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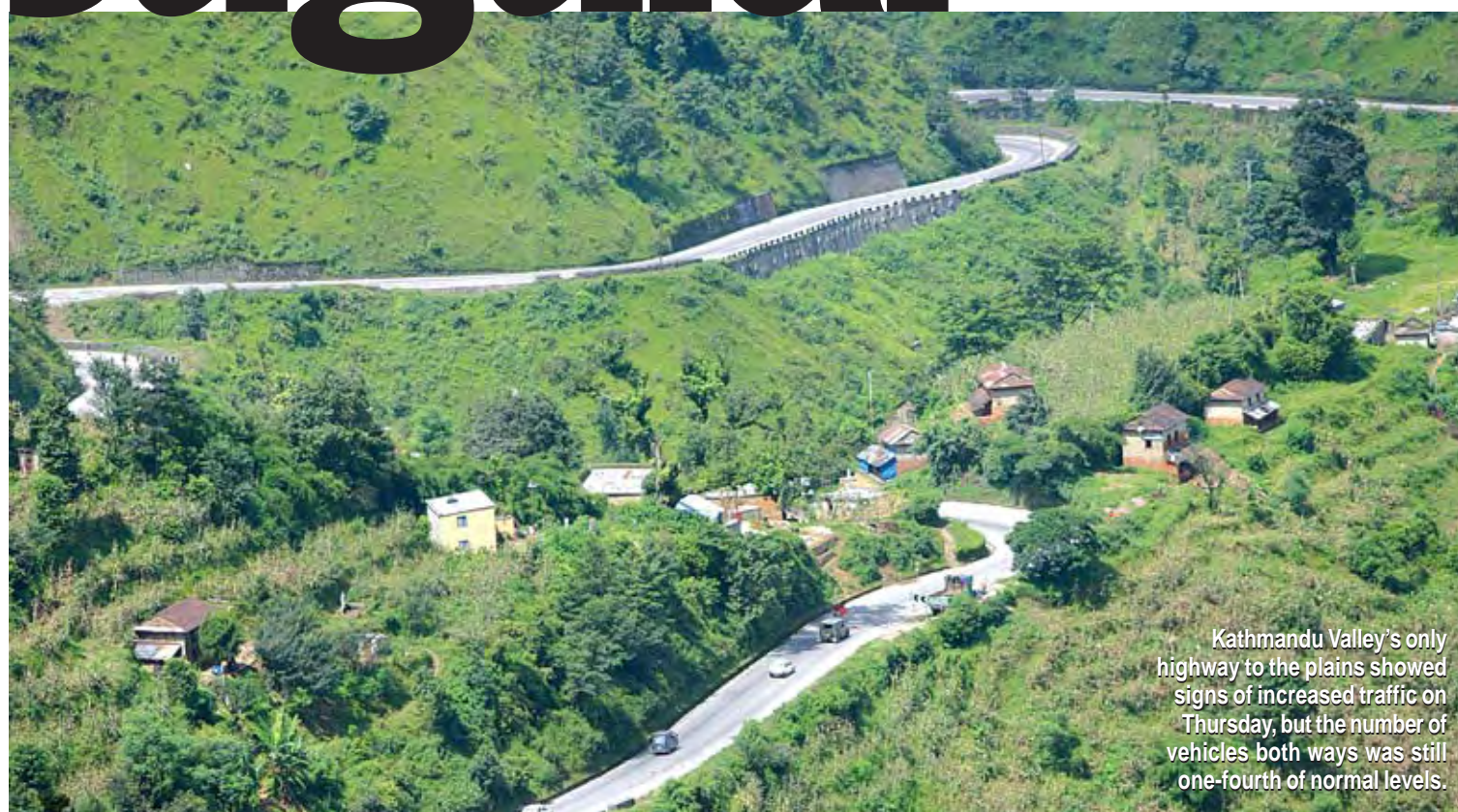
**OUTRAGE**

There has been outrage at the recent Maoist murder of journalist Dekendra Thapa (r). The rebels have threatened to kill 10 other reporters in the midwest. See p6.



# Jugular

The Maoists have embarked on a risky end game by threatening Kathmandu's lifeline

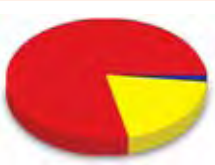


Kathmandu Valley's only highway to the plains showed signs of increased traffic on Thursday, but the number of vehicles both ways was still one-fourth of normal levels.

KIRAN PANDAY

**Times** nepalnews.com  
Weekly Internet Poll # 150

Q. Should the Maoists give up violence and join mainstream politics?



Total votes: 1,121

Weekly Internet Poll # 151. To vote go to: www.nepaltimes.com

Q. Does the Miss Nepal contest degrade women?

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## KUNDA DIXIT

Exactly one year after the collapse of the last ceasefire, the Maoists are testing a blockade on Kathmandu to pressure the palace. This is a move fraught with danger for both sides: the Maoists must win and the army must try to keep a vulnerable highway artery open.

Kathmandu has seen sieges in the past: Prithvi Narayan Shah strangled the Valley before conquering it in 1760s, and in 1988-89 Kathmandu suffered an Indian blockade.

This is ideal terrain for a siege: the narrow Nag Dhunga pass is the only road to the plains. As the first three days have shown, the Maoists don't need to physically have guerrillas blocking the road to stop

traffic.

Putting the pressure on Kathmandu is a way for the Maoists to assert their presence after their central command was nearly wiped out by the security forces over the past six months (see p5).

Two months after coming to power, Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba has been stonewalling on peace despite pressure from his UML coalition partners. The blockade has put the government on the defensive, but may actually have strengthened its resolve not to give in.

Deuba's stand has been that he will not agree to talks just for the sake of talks. To this end, he has set up a plethora of agencies: a high-level peace committee, a Peace Secretariat, a working committee for the

peace secretariat, a multi-party democratic coordination committee. The working committee is to be formed by the high-level peace committee even though a peace coordination committee formed by the past government already exists at the prime minister's office.

All this is sounding like a farce to many peace activists. UML members realise that Deuba is running circles around them, but can't do much. In fact, UML has now switched to blistering attacks on the Maoists for being anti-peace.

The government has said it is in touch with international conflict experts. "We have been consulting with them," says Information Minister Mohammad Mohsin. "Once the Peace Secretariat is set up, we will produce a dossier based

on their ideas." The army is happy with this sort of vagueness. Senior brass told us they have no intention to go for a truce now: blockade or no blockade. But that may actually depend on how tight the Maoist blockade will be and how long it will last.

New Delhi is learnt to be monitoring the blockade and the forced closure of businesses having Indian investments with growing alarm. Indian Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran met Nepal's envoy in New Delhi Karna Dhoj Adhikari on Wednesday to express concern. The Indian press reports Deuba is to visit New Delhi on 9 September. ●

(Reporting by Navin Singh Khadka)

**Editorial p2**  
**Unilateral truce, now**

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## UNILATERAL TRUCE, NOW

Communists the world over are big on anniversaries. The Maoists even more so. No surprise, therefore, that their threat to close down 11 large businesses was timed for the first anniversary of the Doramba massacre on 17 August. The announcement of the blockade of the valley also comes a year after the breakdown of the last ceasefire. The Maoists and the army blamed each other for the collapse of that truce, but it was no secret that their minds were not in it. Both sides were using it to rearm, and the Maoists to take their revolution a notch higher to the 'strategic equilibrium' phase.

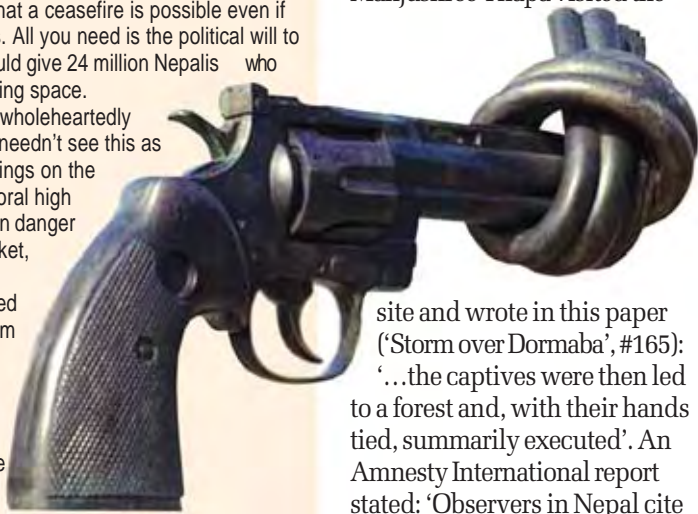
In the past year, the Maoists have skillfully shifted the country's political spectrum to the left—most parties have now come around to supporting at least their constituent assembly demand if not openly espousing republicanism. This was helped in no small measure by King Gyanendra's own uncompromising position vis-à-vis the parliamentary parties in the past two years. The end result is that the conflict in this country has now gone from tripolar to bipolar: we are being forced to choose between republic or monarchy. This blurring of the middle suits the Maoists just fine.

The question is how long do the rebels and the royals want this to drag on. How long do the people have to be punished for this power struggle which is now boiling down to its essence: the supremacy of the monarchy. It would save a lot of grief if the monarch, in the long-term interest of his own dynasty and people, offered a devolution of his traditional powers. By waiting, the consequences may be much more dire for his kingdom and his subjects.

Such a compromise would not be a sign of weakness but of statesmanship. Immediately, it would pave the way for a truce and talks. But the two needn't happen together: we have seen in Sri Lanka that a ceasefire is possible even if there is no immediate prospect of negotiations. All you need is the political will to find a middle way. At the very least, a truce would give 24 million Nepalis who want no part in this war some relief and breathing space.

A ceasefire can also be unilateral, and we wholeheartedly endorse the UML's stand on this. The military needn't see this as a sign of defeat since it won't really change things on the ground. Instead, it will provide the army the moral high ground. The Maoists, whose revolution is now in danger of degenerating into a nationwide extortion racket, would be forced to respond.

By continuing to kill journalists and unarmed citizens, the rebels have earned the opprobrium of civilised people everywhere. Their valley siege is a dangerous end-game gamble to put pressure on the palace. Added up, we sense a desperate attempt to arrange a soft landing. The government must respond with a proactive peace gesture.



site and wrote in this paper ('Storm over Dormaba', #165): '...the captives were then led to a forest and, with their hands tied, summarily executed'. An Amnesty International report stated: 'Observers in Nepal cite

# Remembering Doramba

## A Human Rights Accord needs to be implemented immediately

The first anniversary of the massacre at Doramba on 17 August passed unnoticed.

A ceasefire was in effect when 19 suspected Maoists, including five women, were captured. When news got out, the Royal Nepali Army initially said the rebels had been killed during an ambush. A fact-

**GUEST COLUMN**  
**Seira Tamang**



finding team sent by the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) concluded that 'the majority had died of gun shots to the head, fired from close range'. Two months after the massacre, Manjushree Thapa visited the

the Doramba killings as being instrumental in the breakdown of peace talks and the resumption of violence ten days later.'

An independent army investigation into Doramba ultimately put the blame on the major who had commanded the patrol in Doramba, and the 2004 AI report stated that proceedings to court martial him had begun. However, there are signs of a coverup: the initial story that the 19 were killed in an "encounter", the troops being in civvies, the victims having been subdued some three hours before being executed, and the questionable assertion that a massacre of such magnitude could have been decided by a junior officer in the field.

Doramba had presented a real opportunity to bring the RNA back under civilian control, and the role of its international supporters was key. It was, and is, on them that the army depends on to successfully pursue the counter-insurgency war.

One year later, the legacy of Doramba is glaring: Nepal tops the world in the number of 'disappeared', the 'widespread

impunity' cited in the Amnesty 2002 report continues unabated, and Nepal's judiciary lies in helpless disarray its independence and authority undermined by the power of the army.

There is an immediate protection crisis in Nepal which needs to be addressed. The government's recently-announced National Human Rights Action Plan (NHRAP) backed by UNDP needs careful scrutiny. The official UNDP description of NHRAP says it 'outlines a detailed plan of actions to be carried out in the next five years or so to improve the overall human rights situation in the country'. Yet, as William O'Neill, the independent human rights lawyer brought in to review the NHRAP made clear in his internal report now in the public domain, the NHRAP 'as currently conceived, is the wrong strategy at the wrong time for Nepal's human rights crisis. The focus for the UN should be on protection and enhancing government and Maoist accountability for human rights violations, not on the long-term, more development oriented approach

## LETTERS

### DISRESPECT

You must be out of your mind. How dare you put a picture of a woman who is so brutally killed and her child next to her ('10,000+', #209) right there on top of your online edition? If this is your attempt to sell more papers, it is foolish. The term 'viewer's discretion advised' was created for a purpose. I still think that your publication is the best that comes out of Nepal, but your reputation went down a notch at least in my eyes because of your insensitivity to readers and a disrespect to this little infant. A few years down the road when this poor child comes across your archives, I hope you will have a good explanation on who gave you the right to print this picture of his mother in such a traumatic state. You have added a lot of integrity to Nepali journalism, but this time around, you should really be ashamed.

Sushil Bogati Seattle, USA

Ever since the *Nepal Times* started, I have been a keen and interested reader as with high regard for your paper because it had class. But the extremely graphic photograph on the front page (#209) was disturbing and I was disgusted. I'm sure a lot of other people who read this paper felt the same about such a violent picture. Just what was the purpose? When the little boy in the picture becomes an adult and, by chance, he comes across this photograph—his dead mother lying next to him—do you think it would make him feel great? The dead too deserve due respect.

M Jung, Lalitpur

### BAGMATI

After reading Naresh Newar's 'Gorgeous Chobar' (#207) and Navin Singh Khadka's 'Saving what's left' (#208) it is clear that time is ripe for all well-wishers and the saviours of the Bagmati to have a minimum common

approach to save this civilisation. If things go on like this, there will be no World Heritage Site left to protect with Unesco funds. We should also correct the misinterpretation of the myth of the draining of Kathmandu Valley which your Chobar article has

repeated. Let's not mix up the legend of Manjushri's cutting the Kotwal mountain to drain the lake which happened in the Treta Yuga with Krishna's intervention in Chobar in the Dwapar Yuga. The great thing about the Kathmandu Valley Civilisation is that it is where the geological evidence of a big lake being drained 10,000 years ago through Chobar and Kotwal are interwoven with the mythology. We must honour and respect our river heritage and the important part that the Bagmati has played in the valley's civilisation. In the past 14 years, the Patan Rotary Club's Sankhamool Park project, the Mitra Milan Park at Pachali by the Kathmandu Municipality, Raj Tirtha encroachment across the Pachali Bridge and the UN Park are destroying this heritage. River beds don't belong to anyone, they belong to the river. Flood plains give rivers a place to go when there is too much water. When we constrict the river, there is disaster as has happened many times inside the valley in the past 14 years. Give the Bagmati back to the Bagmati. It is no man's land and everybody's land.

Huta Ram Baidya, Thapathali

### RUST IN PEACE

I liked everything about your ropeway special, from the title ('Rust in peace', #209) to the book review ('Showing us the ropes'). What a waste that we couldn't plan properly and use renewable energy to power transportation in this country, and instead went for imported fossil fuel. But what your

coverage shows is that even when a country's rulers are stupid and selfish, the people will show the way as the pioneers of the Barpak, Bhatte Danda and Manakamana have done. They are our real heroes!

Gopal KC, Kumaripati

● Thank you for bringing the state of ropeways in Nepal to our attention. While many of us are familiar with the very successful Manakamana cable car and have often gasped at the perilous traditional 'ghirlings' and 'khit-khite' on treks it was interesting to read how ropeway technology can be exploited on a much wider scale and can be part of Nepal's overall transportation strategy. *Ropeways in Nepal* which you reviewed provides not only technical information but also the historical context and brings to the forefront the importance of sociological aspects: integrating the demands of the technology with the needs of the people. I was especially interested in hearing the novel concept of using existing underutilised micro-hydro power plants to power ropeways in rural areas, powering ropeways during daytime and providing lighting at night. It was a pleasure to find a technical book that is so self-critical and covers so many different aspects of the implementation of this and other development strategies. The case studies and anecdotes by several of the authors provide a personal touch and are an important chronicle of Nepal's development history. It was inspiring to read the stories of

pioneers who were willing to put their personal credibility (and often also credit) on the line against the daunting odds of officialdom's indifference/incompetence. Ajaya Dixit's account of breaking a leg on an exploration trip to a potential ropeway site and the painful descent on the back of a porter in a wicker basket made a ropeways believer out of him. Both his account and this well-edited book should go a long way towards convincing many readers.

Isabella C Bassignana Khadka, Bansbari

### FLAG WAVING

Thank you for publishing Capt Kul Bahadur Limbu's interesting analysis of what is wrong with Royal Nepal Airlines and what can be done with it ('Proud to fly the flag', #209). People like Capt Limbu and others are the airlines' main assets. There may be some bad apples in the airline, but for the most part the corporation has committed staff. If given the chance to own a share in the airline it will be airworthy again, and very quickly.

J R Pandey, Kathmandu

### NOT MONOLITHIC

Allow us, the Buddhist monastics living and working in Lumbini, to strongly disagree with the following paragraph in Navin Singh Khadka's 'Saving what is left' (#208): 'There is no doubt that Buddhist countries are competing with each other to build monolithic monasteries and temples in the masterplan area.' International Buddhist monastics of different traditions have not come to Lumbini to compete with each other



to human rights that is embodied in the NHRAP'.

Embarrassing though it may have been, the consequences of this review need be taken seriously because Nepal is at a critical stage. O'Neill says: "I have worked in Haiti, Rwanda, Burundi, Afghanistan, Sierra Leone, Kosovo, and Nepal ranks among the worst human rights situations I have even seen."

We cannot afford to have human rights projects which end up being a distraction to the immediate protection crisis, if not an alibi for the continuation of human rights violations. The continually undermined and overlooked Human Rights Accord is the only way to independently measure the commitment of the Maoists and the government to the peace process by 'measuring' their actual behaviour. This has to be made a priority.

NHRC's Sushil Pyakurel stated in an interview last year about Doramba: "All this makes us look like enemies of the army. Whereas we are just trying to enhance their legitimacy. They are a legitimate force of a democratic country. If they don't observe democratic norms, how can they ask the rebels to?" A Human Rights Accord with serious monitoring needs to be prioritised and implemented immediately. ●

# None of their business

## Soldiers camouflaged in pinstripe suits

A partial truth is more deceptive than an outright lie. Government spokesman and Communication Minister Mohammad Mohsin may have been half-right when he said the Royal Nepali Army isn't opening a bank. But the recently amended operational procedures of the Army Welfare

STATE OF THE STATE  
CK Lal



Fund make it unnecessary for the RNA to do anything as crude as going corporate. Taking command of existing enterprises is a lot easier and far more lucrative.

By getting the cabinet to approve its welfare fund rules, the generals have become soldiers in pinstripe suits. Now, the army can buy controlling shares in existing enterprises, including banks, by using the welfare fund war chest. And then it can have them run by select favourites. It is militarisation of the economy by the backdoor.

There is nothing now to stop the army to invest in parastatals like the Nepal Oil Corporation, Royal Nepal Airlines, Nepal

Electricity Authority, Nepal Telecom, Nepal Water Supply Corporation or, even, Rastriya Banijya Bank. And if it needs extra cash, it can collaborate with foreign investors.

The reservations from some donor quarters are just politically correct mutterings for the record. Farang donors are in such awe of the discipline, dedication decision-making capacity of retired and serving generals that they would be happy if the crown jewels of public enterprise fell into the hands of generals than crony capitalists of party politics.

It seems there is nothing now to stop RNA, Inc from dominating the national economy in the years to come. Yet, experiences in other countries have shown that armies in business lose their legitimacy faster than the ones in power.

With the possible exception of the People's Liberation Army in China's controlled economy, nowhere have the armed forces succeeded in business. The military in Argentina, Columbia, and Indonesia have tried, but failed miserably. The Thai military runs a bank and owns media channels, but the image



ROBIN SAYAMI

of the armed forces there hasn't improved due to these extra-curricular activities. It seems the real role model for the *jarsaps* in Bhadrakali is the Pakistani military which controls the largest chunk of prime real estate in that country. It deals in everything from housing to military exports. The result for Pakistani society, however, has been disastrous. Its military is now a law unto itself. It has turned into a dysfunctional state that tests nuclear weapons, but has a Human Development Index even lower than ours. What a paradox that it was a Pakistani, Mahbub-ul Haq, who first thought up human development

rankings and was a vociferous proponent of turning swords into ploughshares.

There are better ways for the RNA to use the money it puts in its welfare fund kitty from peacekeeping abroad. It could run schools, operate hospitals, conduct training courses, build housing facilities, and finance self-employment schemes for its retirees. If invest it must, there can be no safer bet than the state treasury and development bonds with sovereign guarantees.

The amendment of the army welfare fund regulation isn't dangerous by itself. It is the military's mercantilist trend that is worrisome. ●

but out of veneration for Nepal's most-eminent son, Siddhartha Gotama, the Buddha and his sacred birthplace. Facing tremendous difficulties, we are sacrificing our lives for the development of Lumbini, for peace and spiritual development of Nepal. There is no doubt that Mr Khadka's assumption that Buddhist countries are competing with each other is absolutely wrong, and the assertion creates the wrong impression about Lumbini. We invite anyone wishing to accurately investigate the real situation to visit and see the truth. All over the world and across the ages, people have built religious edifices as an expression of deep religious faith. This is also applies to the monasteries in Lumbini. 'Monolith' is defined as a 'large single, upright block of stone, especially one that was shaped into a column by people living in ancient times' or (often disapprovingly) as 'a single very large organisation that is very slow

to change and not interested in individual people'. None of the monasteries here qualifies as 'monolithic'. If Lumbini were to be located in one of the traditional Buddhist countries such as Myanmar or Thailand the monasteries and temples would be much more magnificent. Except for that one paragraph, Mr Khadka's article as a whole is interesting and worth reading.

On behalf of the Lumbini sanga,

Ven. Bhadda Manika  
Panditarama International  
Vipassana Meditation Centre,  
Lumbini

ANGLO-SAXON

Congratulations to Daniel Lak for 'The Anglo-Saxon disease' (Here and There, #205). I read it on my way to a trek in Mustang, and found the analysis excellent and well worded. This disease is leading the world to catastrophe all right. Bravo again.

André Brugiroux, France



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# Capital punishment

KIRAN NEPAL

The Maoists are taking a big gamble with their Kathmandu Valley 'blockade'. They are testing the psychology of the capital's citizens, the reaction of the security forces and also the response of the international community.

They have deliberately left the blockade call vague so that if in the first few days there are indications that it is not working, they can say they never called for it or say they withdrew it keeping the welfare of the masses in mind.

But at a strategic level, this is a rebel effort to assert their presence in the central region after the decimation of their leadership here in the past six months. The leader of their 'ring area', Hit Bahadur Tamang, was among the 11 captured in Patna in May. Now that most political parties have accepted the Maoists' constituent assembly demand, this could be the leadership's strategy to pressure the palace and the army to accept that precondition for talks.

Whether this strategy will work or not will depend on the panic level of Kathmandu's pampered residents, especially if it drags on for more than three weeks. It will also depend on the ability of the security forces to keep the three main highway passes into the Valley open and



RUPA JOSHI

## The Maoists are hoping the blockade will spread panic, fuel discontent and spark an urban uprising

the efficacy of the army's intelligence.

Officially, the blockade has been called by the Maoists' 'people's government' for Nuwakot, Rasuwa and Sindhupalchok in response to the army's killing of Bharat Dhungana, another ring area leader. But Rajman Pakhrin of the Maoists' 'district people's government' says the blockade has the blessings of his party's central leadership. "Our main intention is to provoke the people of the capital to launch

an urban uprising," he adds.

Military analysts, however, think that the Maoists are focusing their battle-hardened guerrillas and their attention on Kathmandu because this is where they are the weakest. The dynamic of their armed struggle means that they must "do something" at the central level to give their own cadre the impression they are winning. They also need to have a Kathmandu-centric show of force to create an international stir to prod UN mediation,

which they have been demanding.

"The Maoists are trying to see if psychological pressure will work," says Royal Nepali Army spokesman, Rajendra Thapa. "All they are trying to do is magnify their limited military strength. It's part of their strategy".

Details have emerged that the Maoists had come to an understanding with the UML that the moderate left would join the government and try to convince the king to discuss the

constituent assembly demand. In exchange, the Maoists had agreed not to set off blasts and suspended assassinations in the capital. Indeed, there has been no major sabotage since the bomb on 15 July at the Nepal Telecom building in Jawalakhel killed an elderly woman.

However, the army killed Bharat Dhungana a few weeks after the UML joined the government and that is when the Maoists announced their Valley blockade. A pro-Maoist intellectual in Kathmandu told us: "The blockade will be effective in weakening the palace, which is the henchman of the capitalist class and its traditional supporters."

However, it is clear that the upper middle class will only be inconvenienced by the blockade. The real sufferers will be day labourers, transport workers and vegetable vendors. There is a danger for the Maoists that even if the blockade is 'successful', it will generate a backlash against them from the very people they seek to bring to their fold.

What the blockade could be is a dress rehearsal for more serious attacks in future. The Maoists could be using cloud cover on the Valley rim during the monsoon to move their forces while the army is distracted with protecting highways. The Maoists want to regain the strength they had in the Valley last year when 500 of

# Disaster in America

A catastrophe makes a mockery of a lifetime of accumulation.

I covered my first American disaster last week, and I found myself thinking, as I went to Punta Gorda in southwest Florida—where Hurricane Charley made landfall—about the nature of suffering in this country.

I suppose I was wondering if I'd have the same sense of helplessness and anger that I'd felt with confronted with absolute loss in South Asia. There I learned to temper my reactions with the thought that someone who loses everything may not have actually lost all that much in

HERE AND THERE  
Daniel Lak



material terms. A house, perhaps some

land, livestock, a few possessions. But if a family survives and aid agencies are on hand to help, then there's a chance that the subsistence life can be pieced together again. This is a discomforting notion, but it's also true—materially, the world's hundreds of millions of poor really don't have that much to lose.

Americans do. I know that far too intimately now, after a few days wandering the ruins of peoples' lives in Punta Gorda. The average American family has thousands of personal possessions—books, knick knacks, photographs, pharmaceuticals, computer



paraphernalia, music systems, CDs, containers, cushions, rugs, linens, soap, furniture, paintings, decorations, tools, toys, videos, televisions, radios, paper goods, clothing, shoes, sporting goods, fishing gear, firearms, home improvement supplies, hobby materials, magazines, newspapers, appliances, dishes, pots and pans...and so on.

When a tropical storm as intense as hurricane Charley hits, those possessions swirl away on the screaming winds. Later,

they come to rest somewhere else—mixed and matched with other peoples' things, trapped in trees, growing soggy in pools of water, floating away on the ocean currents. Strwn all around the utterly devastated trailer park that was my broadcasting site in south Florida earlier this week were peoples' possessions, mingled and mangled in the aftermath of the storm.

Whether it's the family looking for glass perfume bottles in the rubbish of

their trailer, or the old woman who wants to find a cherished chess set published in Mexico, I was struck by how seemingly inconsequential possessions mattered. Devastation, survival, these paled next to a scattering of objects and collected symbols of a life lived.

Perhaps it's wrong to dwell on such things. I should be commending the Florida authorities for a successful evacuation of the hurricane area, or telling the tales of survivors who rode out the storm in trailer homes that pitched up and down and moved along the ground. But I can't stop thinking about how what we accumulate often defines us and how a catastrophe makes a mockery of a lifetime of accumulation.

So I returned from the storm to my comfortable little flat in Miami. I live right on the water, in a perfect spot for a howling hurricane to pick up my possessions and dispense of them. I started wondering about whether I shouldn't just give a lot of my things away and learn to live simply, so that I could reinvent myself quickly in the aftermath of disaster.

I thought about it for a while...then I went shopping. ●



Nag Dhunga pass to the west of Kathmandu on Sunday (top) and Thursday (below)



KIRAN PANDAY

their 'special task force' commandos were supposed to be stationed here. But the army used intelligence from captured Maoists to pinpoint safe houses and decimate the force. The Maoists have admitted that they had to withdraw 350 of their guerrillas from the Valley because of "harm caused by traitors".

The army strategy now seems to be guarding the trails in the surrounding hills to prevent infiltration. It claims to have penetrated the urban core with enough informants to make it difficult for any Maoist clusters to stay in the city. "The blockade is a way for the Maoists to show they are still strong," says spokesman Thapa.

The government says there is enough stock of fuel and other essentials for now, but there is bound to be panic if the blockade is tight and extends beyond two weeks. The Valley needs 100,000 litres of petrol a day, 150,000 litres of diesel, 300,000 litres of kerosene and 120,000 litres of aviation fuel. The Nepal Oil Corporation depots in Thankot and the airport have enough petrol to last 15 days, diesel for 40 days

and 25 days for aviation fuel.

There is enough stored rice in the government's godowns and private shops to last months. However, what will complicate matters is if a prolonged blockade causes panic buying and price gouging. The government says it will not let any shortages happen and has asked consumers and businesses for their cooperation.

Coupled with threats that forced the closure of some of the country's largest companies and hotels, the blockade will put direct pressure on the palace to give in to the demand for talks. For the Maoists, Kathmandu is a place where they can achieve a lot with relatively little: it is vulnerable to sieges, it is easy to spread panic and, despite the army's crackdowns, it is easy to hide in the city outskirts.

The Maoists are hoping that the panic will turn to discontent and fuel an urban uprising. That is a gamble, as it could also easily turn the other way and breed resentment against the rebels. ●

(With additional reporting by Ram Prasad Pudasaini)

# Tourists unfazed



KUMAR SHRESTHA/NEPALNEWS.COM



A tourist van arrives at Nag Dhunga on Wednesday from Pokhara (top). Britons Martin Dow and Robert Hay from (above right), Francois Roston from France (above) and Rachel Bir from Israel (below)



In the wake of the blasts in the backyard of Hotel Soaltee Crowne Plaza on Monday and the transport blockade by Maoist rebels around Kathmandu Valley, tourists already in Kathmandu seem unfazed.

Some said they were anxious to know what would happen next, while others said the blockade a nuisance more than anything else. There were others who believed the whole world is now unsafe, and Nepal is actually quite OK in comparison.

Among the tourists we spoke to, some were preparing to leave for trekking in the Everest and Annapurna regions but others had cut their trips short and come back to Kathmandu.

Martin Dow and Robert Hay, backpackers from London, were among those who decided to play it safe. "We were on the trekking trail in the Langtang region when we heard about the blockade, so we came back to Kathmandu," said Hay. "I see no problem in the streets, but there could be something going on," added Dow.

The most anxious tourists were those transferred to other hotels from Soaltee following the blasts. "We came to know that we were transferred to Yak and Yeti hotel only when we arrived here from Tibet on Tuesday," said Maria Rastelli from Italy. "To take stock of the situation, we will have to take stroll in the streets ourselves."

Frenchman Francois Roston had also been outside the Valley and returned to the capital on Monday. "The situation looks a bit more tense now than it was when I left two weeks ago," he said. "But the streets are calm."

Israeli tourists were the least worried. "We are used to more serious incidents back home," said Rachel Bir from Israel. Her husband, Amit, said he is cautious but not scared.

Even so, news of the blockade and the attack on a five-star hotel have gone around the world and there could be some cancellations in the coming months. The tourist industry, which was looking forward to recouping some of the losses of the past years this season is despondent. They have their fingers crossed that the blockade will be lifted soon.

However, airline bookings show few cancellations and most people are still continuing with their plans for a Nepal holiday this autumn. ●

(Navin Singh Khadka)



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## Outrage grows over journalist murder

Human rights activists, legal practitioners and journalists made common cause to express their outrage at Maoist violence with a street demonstration on Wednesday in Kathmandu (see picture). The silent procession protested the killing of journalist Dekendra Raj Thapa in Dailekh and the Maoists' threat to kill 10 other journalists in the midwest.

Thapa was killed earlier this month by rebels who accused him of "spying" against them. The rebels have threatened to exterminate 10 other journalists because of news they say is critical of them.

The Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ) has deplored Thapa's murder and decided to organise a series of protest programs all over the



RAM HUMAGAIN/NEPALNEWS.COM

country to oppose what it says is a systematic attack on the freedom of press. The federation has demanded that the Maoist leadership make a public apology for Thapa's death and commit themselves to not repeating such acts. FNJ warned of a boycott of Maoist press statements, articles, and opinion pieces if they do not apologise and make public commitments to press freedom. The federation has also sent a strongly-worded open letter to Maoist chief Prachanda, asking him about the Maoists' opinion of press freedom.

The New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) issued a statement and Amnesty International wrote an open letter to Prachanda condemning the killing and expressing alarm at the increasing Maoist violence against journalists. The International Federation of Journalists called for international action against the Maoists for the killing and for threatening to kill journalists.

The journalists from the midwest who have been threatened by the Maoists include Harihar Singh Rathour in Dailekh and Bed Prakash Timilsina, who have been reporting on the insurgency from Achham for *Kantipur* and *Kathmandu Post*. In a strong front-page editorial on Thursday, *Kathmandu Post* said: "If the Maoists are mulling the elimination of the Fourth Estate, let them be warned that such an evil ambition could well be the beginning of their own end."

## Chitwans schools closed

While Kathmandu is preoccupied with the Maoist blockade, 100,000 children in Chitwan have not been able to go to school for the past two weeks due to Maoist threats.

The Maoists have ordered that all schools located in areas with paved roads shut down, and 250 of the 402 schools in the district have been forced to close. These include government schools as well as 10+2 teaching, campuses and vocational institutes. "This is such a big waste, but no one seems to care," says Prem Chhetri, a local principal.

The chairman of the Guardians' Society, Pushparaj Sharma, says that the government doesn't even seem to be aware of the calamity facing education in Chitwan, and the Maoists are deliberately targeting education. Chitwan has one of the highest literacy rates in Nepal after Kathmandu.

Maoist student chief for Chitwan, Ramchandra Adhikari, refuses to bear responsibility for the closure. "In China, schools were the vanguard of the revolution," he told a radio interviewer. Human rights organisations have added their criticism of the Maoist actions, saying it violates children's basic right to education. "They never did care about anybody's rights," says Homnath Kandel, the Chitwan secretary of the human rights group, HURPES. (Indra Dhoj Kshetri in Chitwan)

# Ozzie film roadshow

## Australian films are not just about crocodiles, boomerangs and kangaroos anymore

General knowledge question: when was the first Australian film made? Answer: 1906. Few realise that the history of film in Australia is as old as the world film industry itself.

*The Story of the Kelly Gang* (1906) was the first feature-length film ever made in the world, and although it was later eclipsed by Hollywood, the Australian film industry is coming back like a boomerang. Initially quite small, with Australians such as Errol Flynn, Rod Taylor and Peter Finch forced to go overseas to achieve success, things changed in the early 1970s with government funding designed to stimulate the industry. Directors such as Peter Weir, Bruce Beresford, Gillian Armstrong and Phil Noyce created films that were uniquely Australian and popular around the world. Actors like Jack Thompson, Bryan Brown, Judy Davis and Mel Gibson rose to prominence. Significant Australian films from this time include *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, *Gallipoli*, *Newsfront*, *My Brilliant Career* and *Mad Max*.

In the 1980s, Australia produced its greatest commercial hit, *Crocodile*



*Muriel's Wedding*, *Strictly Ballroom*, *Romper Stomper*, *Shine*, *Two Hands* and *The Castle*.

The Australian film and television industry is continuing to develop, particularly in the areas of multicultural and indigenous film-making. It has also been involved in the digital technology of recent blockbusters such as *The Lord of the Rings*, *The Matrix* and the *Star Wars* series. New releases with Australian involvement include *Master and Commander*, *Cold Mountain* and *Peter Pan*.

Through this rapid growth, there has been an expansion of facilities and training in Australian institutions. Universities and vocational institutes work with the industry to offer courses that provide the skills needed for this constantly changing industry. Today, the Australian industry is internationally recognised as providing a range of skills and talents from locations to animation to acting and production. The Australian Film Roadshow at the Russian Culture Centre in Kamalpokhari this weekend brings the latest fare from down under: thrillers, drama, comedy, and historical dramas. ●

*Dundee*. Local television production also expanded during this period, producing local and international hits such as *Neighbours* and *Home and Away*. The last decade has seen the rise of a newer generation of truly international stars. Actors such as Nicole Kidman, Cate Blanchett, Russell Crowe and, more recently, Naomi Watts, Heath Ledger and Eric Bana have amassed a significant body of work which has won awards, critical acclaim and commercial success.

Directors Baz Luhrmann, PJ Hogan and Gregor Jordan have moved easily between the local and international industry, often accompanied by awards and acclaim. Notable Australian movies from the 1990s include

21 August, 11AM  
**The Man Who Sued God**  
Running time 1hr40mins  
Director Mark Joffe



'Underdog' doesn't even begin to describe the position lawyer-turned-fisherman Steve Myers (Billy Connolly) is in when he decides to fight for justice. Told by his insurance company that lightning striking the boat he lives on is an 'act of God', he reacts like any man today—he sues who is responsible. He decides to take on God, or at least the Almighty's earthly representatives—the Church—and, with the help of journalist Anna Redmond (Judy Davis), the suit soon becomes a class action, as more and more people with complaints about the Supreme Being join him.

21 August, 2PM  
**Black and White**  
Running time 1hr40mins  
Director Craig Lahiff



A confession may not be what it seems, as lawyer David O'Sullivan (Robert Carlyle) finds when he is assigned to defend Max Stuart (David Ngoombujarra), a young aboriginal man accused of the rape and murder of a young girl. He soon discovers that Max's confession was beaten out of him. But the entrenched racism of the times (the film is based on the true story of Rupert "Max" Stuart from 1958), leads him against the police and the justice system. Refusing to give up, he embarks on a journey that takes him to the highest court in the system—the Privy Council of England.

21 August, 4PM  
**The Bank**  
Running time 1hr40mins  
Director Robert Connolly



Under pressure from board members of the bank where he is the executive, Simon O'Riely (Anthony LaPaglia) is forced to think outside the box. Improving profits seems a breeze with a new computer program created by Jim Doyle (David Wenham), and his Japanese partner to predict the stock market. Simon sets Jim up with everything he needs, but as more becomes clear about the bank and as the story comes to include a couple who have lost their

business and their son, plus a former bank teller, Jim finds himself examining his conscience.

22 August, 11AM  
**Crackerjack**  
Running time 1hr35mins  
Director Paul Maloney



Cityside Bowls Club is suffering from dwindling membership, increasing overhead and pressure to sell out from Bernie Fowler (John Clarke). The only answer faithful members Stan (Bill Hunter), Len (Frank Wilson) and Eileen (Monica Maughan) can see is entering a tournament for the prize money. A scan of the membership list reveals that their best hope is Jack Simpson (Mick Malloy), who has never shown up at the club but is instead making money off the parking space.

22 August, 2PM  
**The Tracker**  
Running time 1hr40mins  
Director Rolf de Heer



In 1922, three men are lead across Australia by The Tracker (David Gulpiil) as they search for an aboriginal man accused of murdering a white woman. On the case are The Fanatic (Gary Sweet), The Follower (Damon Gameau) and The Veteran (Grant Page). As they travel across the harsh but beautiful landscape, they reveal truths about their characters, reactions and attitudes. Soon there are shifts of power and racial conflict within the team, and the real question becomes who is leading whom.

22 August, 4PM  
**Lantana**  
Running time 1hr55mins  
Director Ray Lawrence



In a complex web of tangled relationships, marriages and connections, Leon (Anthony LaPaglia) is a police detective who is cheating on his wife Sonja (Kerry Armstrong) with Jane (Rachel Blake). Jane's estranged husband (Glenn Robbins) lives next door to Paula (Daniela Farinacci) and Nik (Vince Colosimo). His psychiatrist, Valerie (Barbara Hershey) is married to an academic (Geoffery Rush). When the dead body of a woman is found in a lantana scrub, Leon's investigation connects everyone in a mesh of love, deceit, sex and death.



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Lumbini

Pokhara

Chitwan

# Misery piled upon upon misery



## Kailash is six, but he is already grownup

RAMESWOR BOHARA in NEPALGANJ

**K**ailash Gupta is six years old, and he sits by the road at Khajura Bajar near Nepalganj selling roasted corn to passers-by. He used to go to school, but these days he has to work from dawn to dusk to pay the hospital fees for his sister Tara, who is fighting for her life. Kailash's tragedy is the result of the 'people's war' being waged by the Maoists. On 13 July, his mother, Bimala Debi, was on her way to plant paddy on a landlord's farm when a Maoist landmine blew up. Bimala was killed instantly, her sister died three days later and Tara is still in hospital. Kailash's father, Ram Chandra Gupta sits with him by the roadside and wipes the tears from his eyes. Ram Chandra and Bimala Debi worked as labourers so they could earn enough to send their children to school. "Kailash really liked going to school," Ram Chandra tells us, "I can't afford to anymore." The family used to live across the border in the village of Machirana in Uttar Pradesh, but dacoits looted everything they had five years ago so Ram Chandra migrated to the relative safety of Nepal. Kailash used to be a fun-loving boy, always laughing and joking with friends. But he doesn't talk anymore, and mostly stares down the road into the distance, as if waiting for his mother to come back. "He has nightmares and calls for his mother in his sleep," says Ram Chandra.

## Sushila lived a hard life, and she died the hard way

RAMESH GYAWALI and SURAJ KUNWAR in ACHHAM

**F**or proof that the most vulnerable victims in any war are women and children, you only need to hear the tragic story of Sushila Jaisi from Achham.

Her tale is also proof that war provides impunity for combatants for rape and other crimes. Because of the fear of retribution, relatives and neighbours have to silently bear the excesses.

Sushila Jaisi was admitted to hospital in Mangalsen with severe uterine bleeding. She had lost a lot of blood, was weak and could hardly speak. After 16 days in the ill-equipped hospital, the doctor told her relatives to take Sushila to Nepalganj. Unable to

afford it, Sushila's relatives brought her back to Janali Bandali village. Eight days after we spoke her in the hospital, Sushila was dead.

While in hospital, Sushila had told us what had happened in her raspy voice. Her husband went off to India in search of work four years ago and she hadn't heard from him since. She was at home with two small children when, four months ago, a soldier from the nearby barrack entered the house when she was alone and raped her.

Sushila realised three months later that she was pregnant. Desperate to rid herself of the shameful burden and apprehensive of becoming a village outcast, Sushila went to

the local midwife for an abortion. The traditional method of abortion in these remote regions of mid-western Nepal is to use a hot iron rod to burn the walls of the uterus. Most women who undergo this treatment never survive. Sushila knew this, but her desperation was such that she decided to do it.

Sushila's internal burn injuries never healed. She had a massive infection, her neighbours saw her suffering and took her to the district hospital.

After 34 years of life, after raising children on her own without a husband to pay for the family, after bearing the violation and humiliation of rape, after suffering excruciating pain for a month,

Sushila died quietly in her village leaving behind two little children.

Her house is now locked up and relatives are looking after the orphans. The villagers have not filed any complaints. They know better than that.

In Kathmandu, we approached the army

headquarters. A spokesman denied that the soldier in question was ever in the area at the time of Sushila's rape. He also cast doubts about whether Sushila had even been raped, saying the dates for her hospitalisation show that she was there before the date of the rape.



## Prahladh was taken away by soldiers and hasn't been seen since

BIBI FUNYAL in CHHAIMALE

**T**he Shri Krishna Secondary School in Chhaimale hit the headlines last month with the Maoist abduction of dozens of grade nine students for three days. They were forced to listen to revolutionary speeches, raise lal salams and were then released.

But few people know that five months before that, soldiers had come to the school and taken away 15-year-old Prahladh Waiba. His father, Chandra Bahadur, 65, is a peon at the school where his son studied. One of his jobs is to ring the school bell.

He had just finished hitting the gong to mark the end of classes for the day when we caught up with him. "I haven't slept properly a single night since my son was taken away," says Chandra Bahadur, who wants to know if the journalists who came to cover the abductions can do something to find his son. "I just need to know that he is alive and where he is," he says.

Prahladh's classmate, Sudarsan, says his friends are all distraught and that he feels bad about Chandra Bahadur's despair. "We see him cry for Prahladh everyday," says Sudarsan.

It was on 1 March that three soldiers in plainclothes came to the school, which is

located 25km south of Kathmandu. They entered the principal's office and showed him a list of three names. Only one of them was present at that time: Prahladh Waiba, a 9th grader. The headmaster was asked to go and get the boy and Prahladh was taken away without any explanation.

According to his teachers, the soldiers promised the boy would be returned soon. Prahladh's father and the headmaster of the school have gone to the military base in Pharping several times but no one could tell them anything.

We approached senior military sources, who told us there are no civilians in detention in Pharping. They said that if Prahladh was a suspect, the boy might have been taken by army intelligence to the capital for interrogation. But the officer added: "We are convinced that the boy was directly involved in an ambush in the vicinity on 15 January that killed one soldier and injured two. Prahladh was the one signalling."

The source says that one out of every five families in Chhaimale is pro-Maoist, adding, "People cooperate more with Maoists than with the soldiers." This may

be true, but villagers in Chhaimale told us they have no choice. Either way, they are victimised.

The chairman of the Sri Krishna Secondary School management committee and Prahladh's teachers disagree that their student is a Maoist. "He is not just innocent, but was also a brilliant student. He should be returned to his family and school," says the chairman. Prahladh's younger brother has fled the village and now works in a restaurant in Kathmandu.

Chandra Bahadur has one simple question to visiting reporters: "The government calls the Maoists terrorists, but they released all the students they took away. Why doesn't the government send my son back?"





MIN BAJRACHARYA

### NAVIN SINGH KHADKA

For the country's oil supply monopoly, Nepal Oil Corporation, the price of fuel was never a problem as long as it made profits and gave out bonuses to its employees.

It never really worried about fuel adulteration, amidst widespread perception that corporation employees benefited from diluting diesel with subsidised kerosene. It just had to make sure the prices were not lower than India so Nepali fuel

wasn't smuggled across the border.

But things have never been this bad, with the doubling of the price of crude in the international market over the past two years. The profits have gone, the corporation is borrowing from banks from month-to-month and there is a real danger it will go broke.

In the past four months alone, a barrel of oil has shot up from \$30 to \$50. India, which

# Oil on troubled waters

## Nepal Oil Corporation is battling to survive soaring international prices, fuel adulteration and discontent at home

imports 70 percent of its fuel, raised prices two months ago. Since then, there was such a price differential that diesel and petrol was being smuggled south in large quantities and even Indian airliners were flying in empty and tanking up in Kathmandu.

As a result, NOC was losing Rs 580 million a month. It has borrowed Rs 2 billion from Rastriya Banijya Bank and Standard Chartered Bank this month to tide over the deficit. "We are looking for another creditor to make payments to international oil supplies for next month," NOC officiating managing director, Hariom D Joshi told us. (See interview, page 8).

This government finally announced a rise in fuel prices, but doesn't go far enough to reduce the corporation's losses—it will still be losing Rs 406 million a month. The question now is how long the banks will keep on bailing out NOC when there is no immediate prospect of it being able to pay them back.

Nepal's international creditors like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank have been pushing to end



NOC's monopoly and allow private entities to import oil. They say they are propping the government up with budgetary support for oil subsidies which are benefitting Indian consumers.

"The irony is that people across the southern border are benefitting because of the subsidies that have triggered cross-border oil smuggling," says Sukhwinder Singh of the IMF Kathmandu office. "Even within the country, the subsidies in kerosene and other fuel products are not largely reaching the poor and are predominantly benefitting industrialists or the middle class."

NOC officials told us privately that only 30 percent of the kerosene imported into Nepal is actually used by the poor. Most of the rest goes to adulterate diesel and petrol.

Even with the price rise in Nepal, there is still a difference of Rs 6 between the price of petrol in Raxaul and Birganj on the border. Diesel is available for Rs 41.5 in India, while in Nepal it is only Rs 31. Kerosene costs Rs 24 in Nepal and 14 rupees more in India.

What the NOC needs to do, experts say, is immediately remove the differential between the kerosene and diesel prices to reduce adulteration, and bring Nepali prices on par with India to stop smuggling.

NOC officials admit pricing can be instrumental in checking adulteration and smuggling, but say it is too politically sensitive to raise prices so drastically. Earlier this year, gas station owners closed down their pumps for a week when the government tried to check adulteration by banning the sale of kerosene and diesel from the same station. The government had to retract its decision and left the issue unresolved by forming a fact-finding committee.

"If the prices of kerosene and diesel are brought closer, it will automatically check adulteration," admits Commerce Secretary Dinesh Chandra Pyakurel. "But the problem is we can't raise the price of kerosene up to the level of diesel because so many poorer households depend on it."

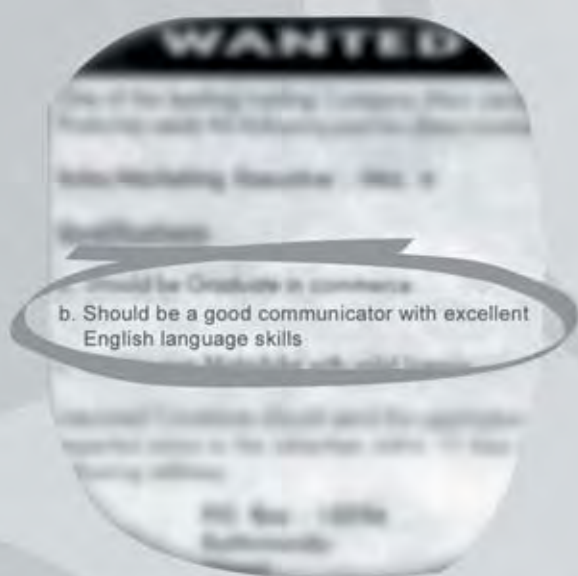
Privatising the oil sector would take care of that problem. Under pressure from the World Bank and the IMF, the government has declared through its budget policy that it will open oil distribution to the private sector.

A rise in kerosene prices could fuel political unrest, but experts say this can be minimised by talking to political parties not in the coalition. The UML, for instance, has reined in its student wing, which had joined the NC street protests against the fuel price hike. "As long as you don't mix politics with oil, it can be handled," said one official.

It's not just bailing out NOC that is the issue here. The government knows that ultimately it will have to pay the banks if the NOC can't. The government is now looking at private distribution in LPG to minus losses due to subsidies. "Within five months we are allowing companies with paid up capital of Rs 1 billion to start distributing LP gas," Pyakurel told us. After that, it is only a matter of time before the private sector gets into diesel and petrol as well.

For now, the government says it has told NOC to adjust prices in line with the international market and India so that the corporation is able to meet the deficit. But for that to happen, the government has to make sure the public discontent does not spill out onto the streets. ●

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## BIZ NEWS

## Business hit by blockade

With drastic decline in the number of incoming and outgoing vehicles in Kathmandu due to the Maoist blockade around the Valley, the worst hit sector is business. Security officials at the Nag Dhunga checkpoint said 80 vehicles entered Kathmandu on the first day of the blockade, down from 500 on a normal day. "Most of the cargo trucks and buses stayed off the road," said an army officer at Nag Dhunga.

Business leaders say they still haven't figured out losses. "It's incalculable," said one, adding that it would run into hundreds of millions of rupees a day. "During Nepal bandas we calculated that the loss amounts to more than Rs 150 million a day," said Binod Bahadur Shrestha, president of Federation of Nepali Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI). "But this indefinite blockade will certainly incur heavier losses."

The government has said it has stock of daily necessities for more than a month (see pg4) but consumers are already bearing the brunt. There is already scarcity of essentials and prices have gone up. "Even when there are vegetables, they are stale and expensive," says Guru Prasad Poudel, a priest from Baneshwor. Ganga Chhetri, a 52 year old green grocer, said since there has been no supply of fresh vegetables, she does not have anything to sell. "Blockades like these don't affect rich people but it is a matter of survival for us," she said. "I hope we will not have to starve to death."

Even so, trucks carrying dairy produce and vegetables have entered Kathmandu from the Sanga pass to Banepa and Dhulikhel, providing some respite to consumers. But as the scarcity begins to bite, many consumers feel some shops are taking advantage of the situation. "It is evident everywhere that business community is cashing in," says 25-year-old Sarina Maharjan, who works in a travel agency.

The government has been assuring and reassuring transport entrepreneurs and business firms that it will provide adequate security. Yet, few appear convinced. "This is the result of fear psychosis triggered by terrorism," said Information Minister and government spokesman Mohammad Mohsin. "We believe we will be able to help people get rid of such fear in the days to come."

The army has been escorting convoys of buses and trucks through the Thankot checkpoint. Said the army officer in Nag Dhunga: "Within a few days, people will come to know that all is well and vehicle movement will be normal again."

## NEW PRODUCTS

**PLASTIC POWER:** The new Nabil Visa Electron card allows holders to make purchases of goods and services from over 500 supermarkets, stores, hotels, restaurants and travel agencies across Nepal, and another 100,000 locations in India with no extra charges. Nabil Visa Electrons are available to any Nabil bank account holder, with no minimum balance requirement and the added advantage of 24-hour service without the worries of carry cash.

**SIZE DOWN:** Marlboro Full Flavor and Lights now come in a flip-top 10's pack format. This comes in addition to the Marlboro 20's already on the market. Marlboro 10's are priced at Rs 38 per pack.



# The business of politics

## Nepal needs a lot more analysts than it has

Over the past fortnight there are many important business and economic issues that have hogged headlines, but very few pieces that actually analyse them. The Beed craves your indulgence for a few pointers.

**ECONOMIC SENSE**  
Artha Beed



The oil prices in the international market have doubled and we are still managing the supply side through a government corporation. While in India politicians have realised oil prices, like prices of other commodities, have little to do rather rely on politics but with global price mechanisms, why do our politicians still want to make it an issue? Why the delay in opening it up to international players and the private sector? If India's retail prices and supply chain determine ours, why not allow Indian companies to operate directly in Nepal as Sri Lanka has done so effectively?

The Royal Nepal Military Bank: is it on or off? The government spokesman made a lame denial. Does the cabinet know what they approved was in fact the operating arena for the Army Welfare Fund? How does the Thai Military Bank function? How do Pakistani army businesses compare? Is it good or bad for the army to get into business? Who is going to regulate these investments?

The two foreign-managed-erstwhile-sick-government-owned banks reported turnaround and good profits this



KIRAN PANDAY

week. This has proved that government assets can be managed efficiently. This was also the Nepal Electricity Authority's anniversary week. This monolithic-loss-making, private-sector-bashing SOE reported a colossal loss. If we can let private management run government banks, why not these public sector dinosaurs?

The closure of 24 major businesses in Nepal due to Maoist threats has received attention all over the world. The government and people in the government, some of whom don't know the difference between an internet page and a word document, is only concerned about getting into the blame game and clearing its own conscience in the local media.

Where is all the impact analysis? What is the impact of

this on foreign investment? What will happen to government revenue (also read individual revenues for people in government) if more businesses are asked to close and some of them decide to fully close shop?

The economics pages of our papers are limited to reporting demonstrations held against the petro-price hike. We need a lot of analysts, and urgently. The type that will spend time on research, keep abreast of national and international developments in business and economy and provide a non-academic common man perspective of the national economy in a globalised world. The Beed could do it for you, but he comes only once a fortnight. ●

arthabeed@yahoo.com

## "Supply stagnant, demand up, means price goes up."

### Nepali Times: Why this sudden price hike?

**Hariom Joshi:** Five months ago, the international price per barrel of oil was around \$30. Now it is \$50. The price of petrol per litre is Rs 62 in Raxaul in India but it was Rs 54 per litre in Nepal. We have raised it to Rs 56. We end up selling oil for less than the price we spend buying it.

### How bad are the losses for NOC?

We have been incurring a Rs 580 million loss every month and this is the worst scenario in the corporation's 32-year history. Last month we borrowed Rs 1.75 billion from the Rastriya Banijya Bank and Standard Chartered to pay suppliers in India. For next month's supplies, we are still looking for creditors.

### Will the recent price hike help?

It will only bring the monthly loss to Rs 458 million.

### Hasn't the government been subsidising you?

We have not received a single paisa from the government for subsidies. We have been paying for cross subsidies in the different petro products. For instances, if there profit in aviation fuel, we plough that into covering the loss from kerosene.

### When you know that the prices are going up in the international market, why don't you ask the government to make commensurate increases?

The government set up a high level pricing committee and we update them every now and then. We believe the committee has been updating the government as well, but maybe the political instability keeps the government from making any decision.

### So, what are the prices that will keep you from incurring further losses?

If we can just maintain price parity with India, we will break

even. That way we can also check the smuggling of the petroleum products to India.

### How about fuel adulteration? How do you check that?

People mix subsidised kerosene with diesel. We have been trying to raise the price of kerosene to the level of diesel. But last week's price rise was not in line with our recommendation. The price of kerosene has remained almost the same and the price of petrol was raised by Rs 2 only. Such increase is too insignificant.

### But, come to think of it, why should Nepalis pay for the government's inability to control fuel adulteration?

There is no fuel adulteration in the depots of Nepal Oil Corporation. It happens at private levels and checking that is impractical.

### It seems oil prices never go down when international prices go down. They only go up.

First, we need to reach the level where we can become sustainable and have some capital to buy oil without borrowing. Once we reach that position, we can adjust the prices according to the change in the international market.

### What are the chances of the prices coming down in the near future?

The chances are pretty slim because this time the price went up during summer and that was quite unusual. The prices go up every winter and that will happen in the coming winter as well. Moreover, the market situation also favours a price rise. The supply situation in the Gulf countries has remained stagnant while the demand for petroleum products is on the rise. Even in our country, more and more vehicles are being imported there is a seven percent annual increase in petroleum consumption. When supply remains stagnant and demand goes up, the most common market principle says that the price will go up.



KIRAN PANDAY

**The rise in prices for petroleum products has become a political hot potato for the government, and Officiating Managing Director of Nepal Oil Corporation, Hariom D Joshi, explains to Nepali Times how the price mechanism works and how badly his office is indebted.**

# Going, going, gone...



ALL PICS (EXCEPT RIGHT): KIRAN PANDAY

**NARESH NEWAR**

More than 2,000 years ago, when India's Emperor Ashoka made a pilgrimage to Kathmandu Valley to spread Buddhism, he left his mark by building four *chaityas*. Also known as stupas, they mark the four cardinal points around Patan, giving the holy city its celestial coordinates.

Originally, the stupas were built on stacks of bricks, which have gradually become grassy mounds in the east, west, north and south of Patan. The ancient monuments still stand at Pulchok, Ebihi Tol, Lagankhel and Imadol. The Ashoka chaityas were built in 250 BC, when Patan was known by its Newari name, Yala, and they could well be the most ancient religious monuments in Nepal.

Historian Niels Gutschow says the chaityas were built to define the limits of the ancient town's 'meaningful sacred space against the profane and non-significant territory around. In ancient times, it would probably be possible from the top of any one stupa to see the other three.

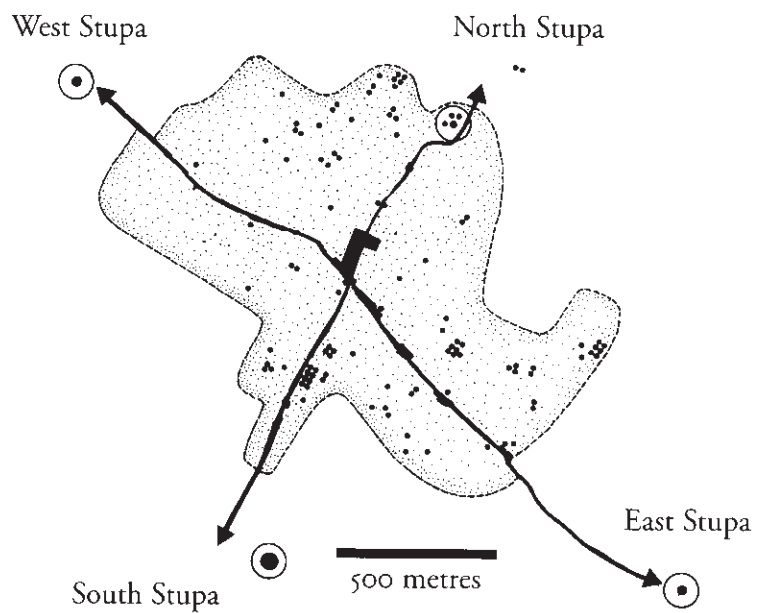
This is why it is sad to see the holy and historic sites being desecrated by urban sprawl, ugly pedestrian bridges, crass hoardings and real estate speculators encroaching on guthi land.

The west chaitya in Pulchok is the smallest of the four and is now dwarfed by apartment blocks, an overhead bridge and a huge shopping complex under construction across the street. A stone's throw away is the Lalitpur sub-metropolitan office,

with its tastelessly grandiose architecture, which is supposed to preserve the town's heritage.

With no mayor, the municipality is leaderless and rudderless. "Things would have been better if there was a mayor," laments a staffer. Two years ago, when Mayor Buddhi Raj Bajracharya ordered the demolition of some houses built illegally near the stupa, he faced stiff opposition from private builders.

Even the government's Department of Archaeology does not have the power to dismantle the buildings or even stop illegal new construction. "The law ties our hands," says an officer. The land around all the four stupas has been legally acquisitioned, and it seems the landowner can do anything with



his property: build a commercial complex, a car park or lease the land for a shop or a restaurant.

The government's helplessness is apparent in Lagankhel, where the largest of

the four Ashoka stupas stands. This stupa is built on higher ground, so it currently dominates the skyline with no buildings to obstruct its spiritual ambience. This will soon change



A TALE OF THREE STUPAS (l-r): While the Pulchok Stupa (West) is smothered by billboards, buildings and a new pedestrian bridge, the Ibihi Tol stupa (East) and the Imadol Stupa (North) are relatively pro

# Patan's Ashoka stupas are Nepal's oldest historical monuments, but they are being choked by construction



NOW AND THEN: The Lagankhel Stupa (South) 50 years ago with a cow grazing on the grassy mound and the holy moat (above) and today (left) threatened by new construction.

though as an empty plot of land owned by the semi-government Namuna Machindra Secondary School is planning a huge two-storey complex to raise funds for the school.

The building plan has already provoked a dispute between the school management committee and local residents. "We will do everything in our power to stop the school from destroying the stupa," says Uday Man Shrestha, president of Lagankhel Environment Development Organisation, which has been actively campaigning against the school's plan.

Shrestha says the disputed land used to be a holy moat that surrounded the stupa and has religious significance. Every year at the end of the Rato Macchendranath festival, priests release a pair of sparrows and a pair of fish into the water to send a message to Lord Indra about the successful completion of the festival.

"This centuries-old tradition will die because of some greedy individuals," says Ajay Lama from Lagankhel Youth Club, which is also campaigning to protect the ancient site.

The school says construction will not jeopardise the holy site at all and maintain there was no holy lake on the land which the government handed over to the school in the late 1970s. School management says it decided to build on the site after locals started dumping garbage in the area. "Nothing can stop us, we have all the documents and permission," says the school's

legal adviser, Purosattam Dhungana. "Besides, why aren't the activists stopping the construction of the tall buildings all around?"

The Department of Archaeology says it tried to stop construction but the school had an air-tight legal case. Ex-mayor Bajracharya is incensed. "I would have never allowed the construction if I was still mayor. All this is happening because there is no mayor," he says. However, it was under Bajracharya's watch that the unsightly overhead bridge was built in front of the Pulchok stupa.

For the local community and conservationists, the issue is not just the school building or an overhead bridge, but that it will pave the way for even bigger buildings and more commercialisation. The Lagankhel stupa is the only one that still has some character left.

The grounds of the east Ashoka stupa in Ebihi Tol have narrowed. Most of the houses here are taller than the stupa, which seems to have lost its religious significance for the locals. When we asked for directions, most couldn't even show us the way to the chaitya. "The blame goes to the Lalitpur municipality, which allowed people to illegally build houses on encroached land. Now it is impossible to remove the buildings," says local resident, Lucheman Maharjan, who has built his own shop attached to the stupa's perimeter wall.

The north Ashoka stupa in Imadol is in an even poorer state. Private house owners have encroached on the land and built brick blocks. Nearby is an empty shell that the VDC spent Rs 1.6 million on building a water tank which was never completed. Local residents don't even bother keeping the holy site clean, flies swarm all over the garbage. The stupa's grassy mound has become a pasture for goats and for children to play.

"It is so embarrassing whenever tourists come all the way here to look for the stupa," says local resident Danu Sunuwar. "Nothing of this will be left when our children grow up." ●



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KIRAN PANDAY

# Squeezed lemons

Human rights activist Krishna Pahadi in *Deshantar*, 8 August

देशान्तर-साप्ताहिक



The Maoist leaders are mere actors who are being used by different power centres. A main aspect of Maoist violence is the uncertainty we see in the tarai today. There is now a probability that foreign powers will use this excuse to enter Nepal. The day the power centres that are backing the rebels decide to dump them, the Maoists will be like flat tyres. They will look like squeezed lemons.

Prachanda and Baburam Bhattarai don't seem to call the shots anymore. They go on making announcements that are never implemented. This gives us an idea of the circumstances under which the

Maoists are being groomed. The two leaders have been saying that they will maintain brotherly relations with other political workers, but people are still being killed because they believe in other political principles. When we can see that the cadres do not obey the leaders, it becomes clear that there are other power centres that are actually in command of the Maoist fold.

When I say foreign powers may enter Nepal, I don't just mean India. When the back door is open, anyone can come in. With increasing militarisation and the stockpiling of arms, our northern neighbour is also getting worried. The other worry is that Maoists have plans to spread their base in the entire South Asian region after establishing what they call their 'model area' in Nepal. Then they plan to change the global political face. That means there would be increasing foreign intervention, and when neighbouring powers start interfering in Nepal's internal matters, the way western powers view the country will also change. Now they are opposing the Maoists. But when the country becomes the playground of regional powers, the western powers will certainly change their strategies on how to meddle and who to back.

The world community has been opposing the Maoist rebels' atrocities. Amnesty International's recent open letter to Prachanda is an indication that Maoist excesses have gone from bad to worse. Even human rights activists, journalists and teachers are becoming targets.

Like any other political party, the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) also seeks help from human rights organisations when it is in trouble. Our office (Human Rights and Peace Society) has been getting repeated calls from different Maoist quarters. They have been asking us to investigate several cases that involve what they call 'extra judicial killings' of their members, including Bharat Dhungana. But when we ask them to release the unarmed people they have taken hostage, they simply ignore our calls.

Once the rebels charge anyone of becoming a government informant or being corrupt, that is a terminal decision.

This proves they have no political culture and that they only rule by the gun. They have begun to use the gun even against human rights activists. They believe that they can treat us the way they did Ganesh Chiluwal, who was killed by their cadres a few days after he burnt effigies of Prachanda and Baburam Bhattarai. The rebels are now openly abducting people in the name of spreading their programs, policies and philosophy. If this is the situation today, what kind of freedom will we have when they come to power tomorrow?

## Taxi!

Rituraj in *Himal Khabarpatrika*, 15-30 August

हिमाल

Taxi drivers exercised their 'democratic rights' to stage a blitzkrieg gridlock, and it worked: the government gave in to their demands. So don't be surprised if the taxi drivers have additional demands like these:

- Taxis should have second priority to ambulances in traffic, and everybody has to get out of the way if we toot our horns and turn on blinking lights
- There should be no speed limit for taxis and we can overtake from any direction
- A taxi driver must be allowed to smoke while driving, be allowed to have a few pegs at night and listen to loud music on the radio
- All drivers have the right to refuse short distance fares and charge what they like at night
- We refuse to wear uniforms, which would infringe on our freedom. We should be free to wear whatever we like, or nothing at all.
- The responsibility of any personal items is the passenger's. If anything is left behind, it belongs to the driver.
- If the driver doesn't have change, he should be allowed to keep big notes and all drivers have a right to a ten percent tip
- The destination is up to the discretion of the driver, not the passenger

## Good luck

Saptahik, 13 August

साप्ताहिक

For over four decades, Nepali athletes have been taking part in the Olympics and returning without winning any medals. Our participation has just been for the sake of waving our flag. It feels bad that countries less developed than Nepal are bringing home Olympic medals. "It is not easy to win a medal, but is possible

with immense hard work and perseverance," says Sangina Baidya, the lone athlete that Nepalis are pinning their hopes on for a medal at the Athens 2004 Olympics. Since the 1952 Olympics in Helsinki, over two dozen Nepali athletes have participated and so far they've only come back with memories and experiences. "If we are to achieve anything, we should start intensive training now to prepare for the next Olympics," says Baikuntha Manandhar, Nepal's famous marathoner who ran in the 1984 Olympics in Los Angeles.

"Athletes and trainers alone cannot do everything, no matter how hard they train," says trainer Narayan Yadab, who adds that they need active support and encouragement from the government and the National Sports Council. Unfortunately, neither the council nor the Nepal Olympic Organisation or the related government department pays much attention to the athletes.

Nepalis could perform well in martial arts and taekwondo. "If not this time, we can hope to get a medal during the next Olympics in Beijing," says taekwondo athlete Dipak Bista, who has already started intensive training and has hopes of bringing a medal home. "We have develop our sports culture in Nepal and if everyone gives us enough support, then we can easily win a medal," he adds. There has been a lot of encouragement for Sangina Baidya. When she was selected for the Olympics, business organisations came forward and offered full support. She will create history if she returns with a medal.

## Red cross victims

Samacharpatra, 16 August

नेपाल रेडक्रास

While most from NGOs are pulling out their projects in the

villages, Nepal Red Cross Society (NRCS) remains the only organisation to work in all 75 districts of Nepal, even in the most Maoist affected areas. Already 17 Red Cross workers have lost their lives, more than 50 have been abducted by Maoists. In addition, they are constantly subject to harassment from the security forces as well. Despite all this, NRCS has not stopped work anywhere in Nepal. Officials say that they can still work safely compared to what they face in other countries affected by civil war like Kashmir and Jaffna.

## Can of worms

Speaker Taranath Ranabhat in *Kantipur*, 9 August

कान्तिपुर

The modern identity and democratic definition of power remains the people's vote. But there is a battle between the ballot and the bullet in Nepal. That is why the supposed owners of the vote, the people, have no role to play and are being crushed between the guns of the king and the rebels. The king has legitimate arms and military strength, while rebels' arms and military power is illegitimate.

Present day Nepali politics is revolving around the legitimate and illegitimate arms and army. The pace of this polarisation is quite fast and dangerous. Worse, political parties that are supposed to represent the people and act as their shield are engaged in the game of vested political interest. People want peace, but the parties have not worked honestly towards that end. There is little effort to forge a consensus and coexist. The bilateral conflict between the state power and the Maoists is taking a trilateral shape, and therefore conflict management is becoming more and more complicated. Knowingly or unknowingly, the parliamentary parties have accepted the Maoist



We're already running the government. What's the big deal about running our own bank?

हिमाल Robin Sayami in *Himal Khabarpatrika*, 17-31 August

### QUOTE OF THE WEEK

"Not only have the Maoists been violating the same human rights which they so often advocate, but they have also detracted from their commitment to respect press freedom which you [Prachanda] had declared on World Press Day. We strongly condemn the Maoists' gross misdeeds in killing our fellow journalists."

An open letter of protest in *Rajdhani*, 19 August, to Maoist leader Prachanda by the Nepal Federation of Journalists, regarding the Maoist death threats against 10 journalists.

## Easing fears

Burmese migrant workers are displaying signs of new confidence about their status as labourers in Thailand. Talking freely on the streets of Bangkok in their own language is one of them. Such openness is also accompanied by a feeling of security that police harassment will wane.

"I have less to worry now; I feel more comfortable when I go out to meet my friends," says Hla Hla Aye, a Burmese migrant worker employed as a maid in Bangkok.

Even migrant rights campaigners are witnessing the emerging shift in the environment. "We can now work with them in the open, unlike before, where we had to distribute information secretly," says Jackie Pollock of the Migrant Action Programme, a NGO based in the northern city of Chiang Mai.

Till early this year, however, the climate was different, with activists chronicling the regular pace of abuse directed at migrant workers in public. There is little doubt that the Thai government's new migrant labour policy, now in the throes of implementation, led to this change.

Under the new migrant labour program, where workers from neighbouring countries have been assured more care and freedoms, a key feature is the worker's right to independently register themselves with Thai authorities. Previously the worker had to depend on the employer to submit the registration papers.

The new program also guarantees registered migrant workers the right to change jobs during the year and the chance of opening a bank account. Bangkok also welcomed the dependants of this foreign work force to register in an effort to document their presence and offer protection.

Success is reflected in the nearly 1.2 million migrant workers who registered across the country between 1-29 July. This marked an over two-fold increase in the number of registered migrant workers from the previous year, which averaged close to 500,000.

What remained consistent, though, was the breakdown of the countries they came from, with most of them hailing from Burma, followed by Thailand's two other neighbours, Laos and Cambodia.



Most of the migrant workers are in jobs that Thai labourers are turning away from, including domestic work, toiling in the agriculture sector, the garment and manufacturing sector and the construction sector. But despite Thailand's current minimum wage—3.30 US dollars—the monthly earnings of migrant workers vary, some being woefully underpaid. Abuse in the workplace is also rampant.

But Burmese political activists do not expect this dismal reality to stop the flood of people pouring through the porous Thai-Burma border into Thailand. The July registration is also revealing the changing profile of workers coming from Burma, which now includes people from central Burma and from the areas closer to the Indian border—a sign of how Burma's economic situation is worsening, forcing more people to leave for jobs in Thailand. (Marwaan Macan-Markar/IPS)

## Retelling history

Nearly five centuries ago, on 15 November 1505, Dom Lourenco de Almeida arrived off the harbour of Colombo in nine ships after being caught in a storm. That accident led to one and a half centuries of Portuguese rule, fuelled with missionary zeal, which can only be characterised by cruelty, greed and intolerance.

While Sri Lanka prepares next year to commemorate the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the arrival of the Portuguese, a group of scholars are on a mission to write their own version of history from the perspective of the colonised. The band of around 30 people are pouring over ancient palm leaf manuscripts, scouring the museums of Western Europe, studying the details of paintings, checking out ancient tombstones and digging for any clues from homes and temples.

"History is written with a perspective and in the case of the Portuguese, like all other colonisers, the perspective is theirs," says Dr Susantha Goonatilake, a well-known Sri Lankan scholar, adding, "what of our colonised people's perspective?"

The Sri Lankan government has other motives for the study. "We will ask Portugal to admit to the atrocities committed in Sri Lanka and make a public apology, we will also seek reparation for loss of life and property during that time and get them to return the treasures spirited away from this land," says Culture Minister Vijitha Herath.

The government is banking on the academic study unearthing enough evidence for it to seek compensation from Portugal. There were unsubstantiated claims that the Portuguese pilfered and plundered Sri Lanka's ancient Buddhist temples. However, Minister Herath reveals that there is evidence the Portuguese destroyed 256 places of religious worship, both Buddhist and Hindu temples along the coastal belt.

In 1658, the Dutch ended the Portuguese rule of Sri Lanka, then known as Ceylon. After the Dutch, the country was under the British until 1948—when Ceylon gained its independence.

Asked whether such an inquiry would stir up religious strife in a country that is already a simmering in a cauldron of religious intolerance, Herath says, "It will help us to accept what has happened and move ahead to the future...it will put history in its right perspective."

'Scores of churches have been attacked in the past two years by majority Sinhalese groups, claiming fundamentalist Christians were all out to convert Buddhists. (Kumudini Hettiarachchi/IPS)



# Final countdown

## Polio eradication is in its last stages worldwide

GUSTAVO CAPDEVILA in GENEVA

The spread of poliomyelitis could be totally curbed worldwide this year and the disease could be eradicated by 2005, thanks to the removal of the last obstacles in Africa according to David Heymann, WHO special representative on polio eradication.

The polio immunisation campaign has resumed in the northern Nigerian state of Kano, where it had been suspended a year ago due to rumours about the safety of vaccines.

Circulating around that largely Muslim area were rumours that it was contaminated with HIV or contained elements of family planning which sterilised young girls. Due to the rumours, Kano Governor Ibrahim Shekaru called off the vaccination campaign, as did authorities in other northern states in Nigeria.

The suspension of the campaign led to a resurgence of polio cases in Kano and other Nigerian states, and in neighbouring countries that had been declared disease-free. The Nigerian government subsequently set up a commission to evaluate the vaccines, and the authorities in Kano

set up two separate teams of experts to do the same. The verdicts handed down by the commissions cleared up the doubts and recommended that the immunisation activities continue in Kano state.

Governor Shekaru himself administered the vaccine to four children of government officials. Heymann said there was still some resistance from certain religious leaders but the Nigerian press had a "very positive" attitude.

Heymann said the renewed vaccination efforts would allow northern Nigeria to "catch up" with the southern states and the rest of West Africa.

Polio is an infectious viral disease of the central nervous system that causes muscular atrophy. The greatest incidence of the disease, also known as infantile paralysis, is in children aged five to 10.

So far this year, 538 children have been infected worldwide, including 430—80 percent of the total—in Nigeria. Affected countries include India, Afghanistan and Egypt, which Heymann said "have the lowest ever reported numbers polio

cases" this year.

"We believe that they will be able to interrupt transmission in the next few months," said Heymann. The Asian countries "have been able to maintain very low (transmission) levels." He warned, however, that there are still risks in those countries, like the possibility that governments will feel confident, let down their guard, and allow polio to return.

The four bodies behind the global campaign—WHO, the United Nations children's fund (UNICEF), Rotary International and the US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention—have a goal of complete eradication around the world by 2005.

In Africa, transmission could be cut this year. However, a period of three to six months is needed to be sure transmission is interrupted, and twelve months to be certain, so success would not be confirmed until next year. Heymann also said the religious leaders are "very important," and that UNICEF is working closely with them in Central Africa. ● (IPS)

# India battles resistance

Global plans to eradicate polio continue to flounder in India's Uttar Pradesh state, which has more than 53 percent of India's burden of the disease. This is hampering a worldwide eradication program.

India's Health ministry officials blame resistance to polio immunisation by members among the Muslim community, a sizeable section of the population in western Uttar Pradesh, a state with over 170 million people. Badaun with seven cases and Moradabad with five are the worst affected districts this year.

"Some Muslim families resist immunisation in the belief that we are trying to sterilise them," said a health ministry official. Of the 15 cases of polio reported so far this year, 11 were those of children from Muslim families.

Some 200 million doses of oral vaccine are administered in two single-day 'pulse' immunisation campaigns every year across India to reach all children under the age of five. This attempts to replace the wild virus with the attenuated one used in the vaccines. But such has been the resistance immunisation efforts in Uttar Pradesh and adjoining Bihar that health workers risk being beaten up by irate Muslim villagers, who believe that the drops are part of a global conspiracy against people of their faith.

Similar attitudes have been reported from other parts of the world, notably Nigeria's Kano state (see above). In India, to counter false rumours and beliefs Rotary International and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) have roped in support from religious leaders and academics from the Aligarh Muslim University (AMU). The AMU's efforts were being led by vice-chancellor Naseem Ahmed who personally administered polio drops to infants in reluctant Muslim homes.

India's efforts are crucial to the Global Polio Eradication Initiative, launched in 1988 when the disease was endemic in 125 countries affecting 350,000 people annually. By 2002 that figure was reduced to just 1,866.

A deadline for total eradication now set for 2005—five years behind the original target of 2000. Nepal is also approaching a 100 percent polio-free status, due to massive immunisation campaigns—but this will mean nothing if there are still transmission threats from the south.

Still, India has made remarkable progress from scenario of the 1980s when the country recorded 20,000 new cases annually. ● (Ranjit Devraj/IPS)



# Remitting development

The number of international migrants has more than doubled since 1970.

Worldwide, one in every 35 persons is now a migrant. In 2003 the money they sent home was \$93 billion. If unofficial transfers are also counted, the volume of such remittances

## OPINION

Brunson McKinley



could be double this amount. These figures are staggering, exceeding the \$68.5 billion that rich countries currently spend on official development assistance.

Migration has major implications for development. In every region of the world, remittances are raising the standard of living of millions of poor people by providing critical resources for food, shelter, health care and education. In many developing countries, remittances represent the most important source of foreign exchange, outstripping investment, lending and exports of commodities and manufactured goods.

Migrants have long been ignored as a resource. Instead, they have been perceived either as an economic burden on countries of destination or as a potential loss to their country of origin through 'brain drain'. There is another side to this story. Migrants are helping to

## Poor countries must make the best use of money their migrant workers send home

maintain important social and economic linkages between the developed and developing worlds that alleviate poverty in very significant ways. Flows of remittances and the return of migrants with new skills can offset the loss of migrants and may even lead to a 'brain gain'. Modern communication and cheaper transportation make it easier for migrants to maintain links with their home countries, creating opportunities for investments and the sharing of know-how.

Remittances alone are no panacea for the ills afflicting poor countries, and they should not be seen as a substitute for foreign aid. But as remittance flows increase, it is more necessary than ever for the migration and development communities to begin speaking more effectively with each other. The challenge is to design coherent policies that shape and best utilise the potential benefits of migration for development. This would also be entirely consistent with the recent recommendation of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund for improved policy coherence in the development arena.

There are some positive signs that governments are beginning to move in this direction. The

first point of the new action plan to combat poverty in the developing world agreed upon at the recent Group of Eight summit meeting on Sea Island, Georgia, talks about the potential contribution of migrant remittances to entrepreneurship and private sector development efforts.

There is much that could be done to enhance the development impact of remittances, such as:

- Reduce the cost of transactions. Transfer fees for sending remittances range from 13-20 percent of the remittance value, although the transfer could actually be made for as little as 2-3 percent. Increased competition among providers of remittance services would reduce costs and could save hundreds of millions of dollars a year, with the benefit flowing to migrants and their family members.
- Provide more reliable information so that migrants are better informed about the real cost of remitting and the different options available.
- Increase the volume of remittances. Countries that send migrants need to promote financial instruments to make it more attractive for migrants to remit. Greater efforts must be



made to reach out to migrant communities in developed countries and their families in developing countries to ensure access to basic banking services.

• Enhance development impacts. Remittances have the greatest development potential where they create jobs. Governments should support practical remittance management solutions that facilitate investments in entrepreneurial and other job-creating activities.

• Explore innovative practices such as the creation of

microenterprise lending schemes, bond issuance against future remittance flows, information campaigns on remittance management and capacity-building for consular offices.

Creating the appropriate policy environment to facilitate the transfer of remittances would constitute an important step toward harnessing their enormous potential to foster social and economic development. •

Brunson McKinley is director general of the International Organisation for Migration in Geneva.



## Foreign Policy, Pvt Ltd

### Contracting out the functions of foreign policy to well-connected private groups opens up opportunities for malfeasance

Harvard University as well as Shleifer and his wife, and Hay and his then-girlfriend now wife, the two women were subsequently dropped from the suit.

The ruling, however, underscored the pitfalls in contracting out traditional functions and responsibilities of governments in foreign policy and assistance to a small, well-connected group. Hay and Shleifer were supposedly providing impartial advice while making personal investments with the benefit of insider knowledge. This was before the Bush administration began outsourcing military and nation-building activities in Iraq. Now, in a similar way, administration insiders who led the rush to war in Iraq are benefiting from foreign policy and homeland security strategies they advocated.

In the 1990s, during the heated years of Russian reform, the now-defunct Harvard Institute for International Development became a manager of US economic reform aid to Russia, with the help of influential Harvard-connected associates in the Clinton administration.

On alleged grounds of 'foreign policy' considerations the Harvard Institute was granted some exemptions to competitive bidding and given authority over other contractors, some of whom were their

competitors. The virtual carte blanche given the Harvard group enabled them to wear all manner of hats, from government to business and university.

Their conflicting roles went beyond investments in Russian securities, equities, oil and aluminium companies, property and mutual funds named in the law suit. Although ostensibly a representative of American aid, Hay was able to approve some privatisation decisions of the Russian state on authority given him by the Russian members of the Harvard-Russia group, some of whom also served as officials in the Russian government. Shleifer readily acknowledged making personal investments in Russia, but denied in court this was a conflict of interest.

A decade later, the outsourcing of government functions has accelerated. Harvard's contracting coup was unusual at the time, to hear procurement officers tell it. But it pales in comparison with some of the huge, non-competitive awards, justified on national security grounds, granted for work in Iraq.

Defence companies linked to senior members of the administration's inner circles have been the beneficiaries of some of these awards. To make matters worse, 'private' contractors not only

implement policy but, occasionally, make crucial government decisions seconded or checked only by bureaucrats with connections to the contractors. And this makes it difficult to pin down roles and responsibilities. It is sometimes impossible to determine who speaks on behalf of the state, or is even responsible to it.

Officials with the US Government Accountability Office, the congressional body charged with auditing public expenditure including on homeland security and anti-terrorism measures, recently told me they had been directed on occasion to contractors rather than government officials. As became all too clear with the interrogator-contractors involved in the Iraqi prisoner abuse scandal, when roles are ambiguous accountability is elusive.

As long as the US continues to contract out critical government functions to small coterie, America's interests, along with its moral standing, will be repeatedly undercut by private considerations. • (c FT)

Janine Wedel is associate professor, School of Public Policy, George Mason University, and author of *Collision and Collusion: The Strange Case of Western Aid to Eastern Europe*.

A US federal court found in a recent ruling that Andrei Shleifer, a noted economics professor at Harvard University, and Jonathan Hay, a legal adviser also working for Harvard at the time, conspired in the 1990s to defraud the US government while helping to run

## COMMENT

Janine Wedel



a nearly \$400m US-funded project to reform Russia's economy.

The \$120m suit, brought by the US justice department in 2000, named

# Big bad donors

Government bad, non-government good.  
Aid to government bad, aid to non-government, good.  
Liberalised trade bad, welfare good.  
Aid is bad and trade is bad.  
Loan bad, free money good.  
Poverty bad, prosperity good.

That just about sums up this 104-page review of foreign aid to Nepal in 2003 which includes analyses of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) and the macroeconomic situation.

REVIEW  
Binod Bhattarai



*A Review of Foreign Aid in Nepal, 2003* is published by the Citizen's Poverty Watch Forum and ActionAid Nepal, and is the fourth in a series of books on foreign aid by the publishers. The book's bottom line is that foreign aid has been a failure all over the developing world, and since the same formulae are being employed in Nepal, it will fail here too.

Nepal is getting poorer by the day, its income disparity makes it one of the most unequal countries in the world.

Insurgency-related migration to the cities has meant that urban poverty is growing exponentially. "It is difficult to accurately assess poverty trends over time," the authors write, "What we can conclude is that the absolute number of poor people has almost doubled over a period of 25 years."

So what can be done? Unfortunately, don't look here for answers. The book doesn't get further than lamenting the failure of foreign aid and quoting like-minded researchers to lambaste the usual suspects. Even journalists are quoted (the venerable Daniel Lak, whose chronic foreign aid-bashings appear regularly in the pages of this paper) to conclusively prove that foreign aid leads to foreign interference.

This review of the review has to conclude that it is predictable in its conclusions, and those exploring more enlightened analysis should look elsewhere. It comes with three main chapters, one reporting the current macroeconomic scenario, another reviewing foreign aid, and the last discussing the PRSP. The macroeconomic section touches on everything from poverty, GDP to debt servicing, regurgitating

readily available government and UN statistics with very little actual analysis. The Nepal Rastra Bank's monthly economic roundup has fresher statistics than the dated data in this book. The macroeconomic analysis relies on figures that go back to March 2003. The impact of the conflict on macroeconomic indicators, which at the very least deserved a separate chapter, is conspicuous by its absence. There is mention of 'negative growth' of 2001/02, but there is almost no explanation for the contraction, which could have made more sense as a fulcrum of the analysis of foreign aid after 2001.

Deficient interpretation of stale statistics leave readers with just too many 'why' and 'so what' questions. For example, the researchers cite that percentage of regular expenditure for debt servicing increased from about 10 percent in the mid-1970s to 29 percent in 2003/04 but don't bother to explain why. Was it increase in debt volume in the 29-year-period, or could it be that some debt may have matured? Was it Nepali rupee depreciation? We are left to scratch our heads and figure it out ourselves. If you start from the premise that

**If you start from the premise that all government is bad, aid is bad and donors are bad, your analysis will be bad**

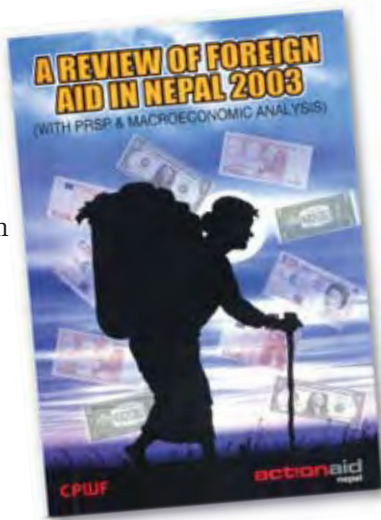
government is bad, aid is bad and donors all have ulterior motives then your conclusions are going to be limited to knee-jerk rhetoric.

Foreign aid to INGOs grew from 2.7 percent of total in 1990 to 4.56 percent in 1999 who together spend almost 80 percent of the aid going to the sector. What we would have liked to know is what proportion of that was earmarked for bilateral government aid to Nepal, how much was obtained as sub-contracts from Nepal-based donors which is also already counted in the total bilateral aid.

The gist, therefore, is: overcoming poverty (bad) should be everyone's preoccupation, the

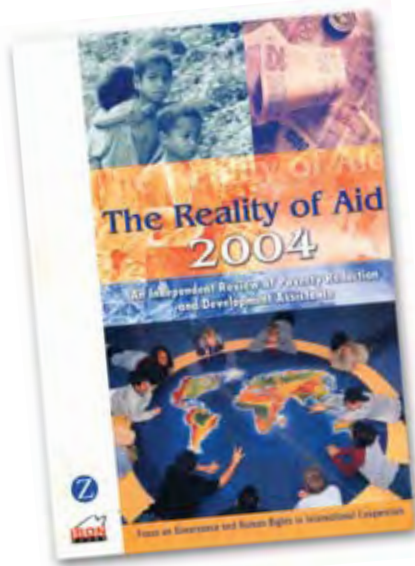
PRSP (bad) may not be the solution because of its neo-liberal (bad) macroeconomic underpinnings, also because the World Bank and the IMF (both bad) are involved, and because it aids the process of economic globalisation (bad), and in most countries public hearings of PRSPs did not include civil society (good). Quoting from Panos Briefing papers, the authors go on to demonstrate that international experience with PRSP makes it a flawed democratic exercise, and even if it works it will have worked for the wrong reasons.

Perhaps it would be too much to expect the publishers to provide an alternative ideological driver. But a minimal attempt to objectivise the conclusions would have made them more credible to the politically-not-so-correct readers. After all, we're not just preaching to the converted are we? ●



*A Review of Foreign Aid in Nepal 2003*  
(With PRSP & Macroeconomic Analysis)  
Citizens Poverty Watch Forum and ActionAid Nepal, Kathmandu 2004  
Pp 104-pages  
Rs 100

# The aid reality



The Manila-based IBON Foundation (named after the majestic Philippine eagle) has been bringing out the annual monitors of foreign aid with its *The Reality of Aid* since 1992. Paradoxically funded by donors, the series often became an exercise in self-flagellation since it was a case of OECD countries and the NGOs they support bashing themselves.

But in the past decade or so, the ownership of *The Reality of Aid* has shifted to the south, and IBON has tried to get its handle on the structural problems with foreign aid that makes it so ineffective in raising living standards of the poor both globally and within countries.

The 2004 edition looks at some good practices, where aid has worked. The lesson: it has worked wherever the local community has taken charge, and where donor agencies have made poverty alleviation the focus of their work. Nationally, greater attention to governance by the aid community has yielded results.

This year's edition has a political overview which looks at the global mechanisms that hinder aid efficacy, including aid conditionality to push neo-liberal values in the Bush Junior Era. Our own Gopal Siwakoti 'Chintan' of the Nepal Policy Institute has a chapter which begins with the sentence: 'Nepal is arguably the most beautiful country in the world.' Ahem.

Chintan argues that western donors to Nepal have ignored human rights and governance, for which he has taken his pet projects Kali Gandaki A and Melamchi as examples.

This is an easy-to-use guide for everyone who always wanted to learn a lot more about who gives what and to whom and why, but couldn't be bothered to ask. For example, did you know that Norway and Denmark gave away nearly one percent of their national wealth in foreign aid? The United States gave only 0.13 percent even though in volume terms it was the world's largest donor with \$15 billion in 2003. Foreign aid in real terms has remained stagnant at \$60 billion since 1989. ● (Kunda Dixit)

*The Reality of Aid, 2004*  
An Independent Review of Poverty Reduction and Development Assistance  
Judith Randel, Tony German and Deborah Ewing  
Ibon Books, Manila and Zed Books London 2004  
editors@ibon.org  
www.ibon.org

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## BOOKWORM



*The Roaring Nineties*  
Joseph Stiglitz  
Penguin Books, 2003  
Rs 650

Joseph Stiglitz, winner of the Nobel prize for economics, reveals the truth about the decade where US-style capitalism reigned, then fell. A chief economic advisor, he exposes the inside story of what went wrong, and how the Bush administration is making things even worse by refusing to learn from the past.

Courtesy: Mandala Book Point, Kantipath, 4227711, mandala@csl.com.np



# The Olympic hope

Whenever anyone asks me why the Olympics are my favourite event, I give anecdotes, not examples or logical reasons. The hours are long, the travel often tedious. But invariably, there is a bizarre juxtaposition that holds out the possibility of hope.

Such a quintessential Olympic moment unfolded Monday at the Olympic Village. This was flag-raising day, when each delegation was welcomed into the village.

At about 5:30 on Monday evening, about 150 journalists packed an auditorium in the athletes' village to get their first glimpse of the Iraqi delegation. The delegation arrived shortly after 6 pm with the buzz and electricity that accompanies an important news event. The delegation's tone was somber, as earnest as it was enthusiastic. A 24-year-old boxer spoke of the

privilege of fighting for his country, showing the world that Iraq, despite being occupied—primarily by the United States—was on the way back. Others spoke about the hope of a new Iraq symbolised by its athletes. "We are starting from scratch," said Dr Tiras Odisho, the director general of Iraq's National Olympic Committee. He announced that there would be prizes for Iraqi athletes who won medals: \$25,000 for a gold, \$15,000 for silver and \$10,000 for bronze.

An hour later, 50 meters away in an open plaza, the US delegation was being welcomed in an upbeat, festive celebration of high expectations. When the US ceremony was over and the Iraqi news conference ended, American athletes and officials crisscrossed with Iraqi athletes and officials, both delegations quickly and easily blending into a sea of other nations. This, to me, is hope.

**VANTAGE POINT**  
William C Rhoden



But here is the problem for many American athletes who have chosen to participate in these Games: The Iraqi athletes may carry the scars of war, but American athletes carry the burden. Normally, the US flag is flown outside the housing area immediately after the flag-raising ceremony. The flag was not flown Monday. At these Games, the US delegation decided that it wanted its athletes to settle in and get comfortable first.

The explanation for the break in tradition is simply that it's a different world now. There is an uneasiness greater than at any Games in the last 20 years, an acute awareness of being not just an American, but also being in and of the United States.

Whether you oppose the war in Iraq and its residue, as I do, or whether you support the war, as many do, people from the United States are all grouped together in this setting. Members of the U.S. Olympic team are being given pointed reminders and instruction about their behaviour. Herman Frazier, a former gold medalist in track, is the chef de mission, or general manager, of the delegation.

Will fans still be encouraged to chant "USA! USA!" at these Summer Games, or will they be asked to applaud and politely wave an occasional flag? Jennie Finch, a star pitcher for the softball team, says she is not disguising her nationality.

The 46-member delegation from Iraq and the nearly 1,000-member delegation from the United States marched into the Olympic Stadium on Friday for the majestic beginning of the 28th Olympiad. A parade of nations, many at war with one another, many carrying on tribal conflicts that span generations.

There is something gratifying about watching athletes interact in the village, speaking the universal language of competition and hard work. This is a tradition that dates to antiquity, when warring factions competed and forged friendships along the way.

The Games are a road map for possibility. Our politicians drag us into these messes; maybe our athletes can lead us out. ●

William C Rhoden is the sports columnist for the New York Times.



The Men's Shotput finals were held on Wednesday at the ancient stadium in Olympia, the site of the first Olympic Games in 776 BC

# Underdog Olympics

## Like a lightning bolt from Zeus in a Big Fat Greek Olympics where crowds are thin

ATHENS: Basketball minnows Puerto Rico pulled off one of the biggest upsets in the 108-year history of the Games with victory over the United States 'Dream Team'.

In the swimming pool, an expected showdown between the powerful Australian and United States contingent went out the window as South Africa, France and Japan snatched three out of the four golds on offer.

South Africa's 4x100 metres men's freestyle relay team of Roland Schoeman, Lyndon Ferns, Darian Townsend and Ryk Neethling, took gold with a new world record of 3min 13.17sec.

The Puerto Ricans' stunning 92-73 win over America's team of pampered NBA millionaires resounded across the Games like a lightning bolt hurled by Zeus.

China remains on top with 10 gold medals on the fifth day of Athens Olympics. Over all 21 gold medals distributed in different events on Wednesday.

The biggest upset occurred in tennis when Top seed Roger Federer of Switzerland crashed out of the Olympic men's singles on Tuesday losing 6-4, 5-7, 5-7 to unseeded Thomas Berdych of the Czech Republic in a second round tie.

Michael Phelps of the United States won the Olympic Games men's 200m butterfly gold. The United States also won the Olympic Games men's 4x200m freestyle relay gold. So far, Michael Phelps had won five including three gold medals.

India won its first medal on Tuesday in the Olympic Games. Rajyavardhan Singh Rathore won a silver medal in the men's double trap event.

But it was nothing

compared to Puerto Rico's incredible victory in the basketball, the first time the United States had been beaten since they began sending professionals from the NBA to compete in the Olympics in 1992.

In a further upset, Argentina defeated world champions Serbia and Montenegro with a last-gasp 83-82 victory on the buzzer. Yet the shocks weren't just confined to basketball and swimming. In badminton, world number one Lin Dan of China, regarded as the game's most exciting talent for years,



ATHENS 2004



was outshone by unseeded Ronald Susilo of Singapore, losing 15-12, 15-10.

In the football tournament, war-weary Iraq's fairytale campaign continued as they secured their place in the quarter-finals with a 2-0 win over Costa Rica. The only blemish on a memorable day was the fact that many events were played out in front of empty stadia as concerns over sluggish ticket sales deepened.

Organising officials tried to play down the poor attendances, saying that they

knew at the beginning of the Games some events would be badly attended because they were not popular sports in Greece. So far 2.9 million tickets have been sold out of a total of just over five million. At the last Olympics in Sydney, most of the 9.5 million tickets on sale were snapped up. The International Olympic Committee, concerned the Games' image could be tarnished if competitions are held in front of half-empty stands, raised the issue with organisers on Sunday.

In the judo tournament, Iranian two-time world champion Arash Miresmaeili failed to make the weight for a contest against an Israeli fighter he had previously vowed to boycott.

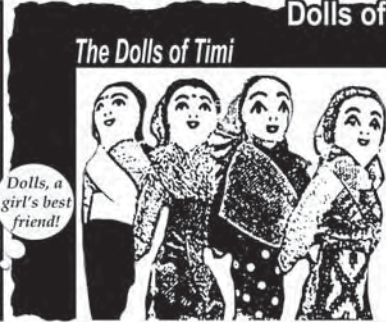
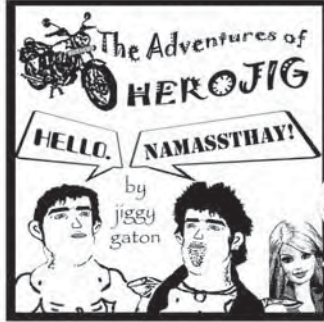
Greek sprinters Kostadin Kenteris and Ekaterini Thanou, who missed mandatory dope tests at the Olympic Village before the opening of the Olympic Games, have withdrawn from the games after leaving the IOC hearing into the case. Kenteris, who shocked the world by winning the men's 200m sprint from the 2000 Games in Sydney, insisted he was innocent of any wrongdoing but said he would quit the Olympics.

"I categorically declare that I was never informed or told to present myself for a doping control in the Olympic village," said the 31-year-old. "But in the interests of the country, I am withdrawing from the Games and I also announce the end of my cooperation with my coach Christos Tzekos."

The biggest smile of the week belonged to pint-sized Thai weightlifter Udomporn Polsak, who became the kingdom's first ever female Olympic champion with victory in the 53kg category. ●

STATUTORY DIRECTIVE : SMOKING IS INJURIOUS TO HEALTH

"Lata ko desh ma gaando tanderi." (In a land of fools, even a man with a bad goatee can be a hero.)



**The Dolls of Timi**

- Somewhat shy
- Well dressed
- Loaded with values
- Respectful
- Sensible
- Simple



**The Dolls of LA**

- Totally insane
- Hardly dressed
- Botoxed and detoxed
- Boob-jobbed
- Butt-lifted
- Stomach-stapled

**KE GARNE? WHATEVER.**  
But be a Heroji - and Kiss ur Girl

"Though we travel the world over to find the beautiful, we must carry it with us or we find it not."  
-- Ralph Waldo Emerson, American Writer (1803-1882)

Next change:  
Herojig gives up his search for Dhal Bhat in LA.

HeroJig's Adventures can also be seen at [www.extreme-nepal.com](http://www.extreme-nepal.com)

#34 ♀ 2061 by jigme gaton - read. love. write.

**ABOUT TOWN**

**FESTIVAL AND EXHIBITIONS**

- ❖ **Charcoal drawings** by Youdhisthir Maharjan at Indigo Gallery, until 29 August. 4413580, [www.asianart.com/indigo](http://www.asianart.com/indigo)
- ❖ **Contemporary Expressions from India** Various artists celebrating India's 58<sup>th</sup> Independence Day. Until 30 August at the Siddhartha Art Gallery

**EVENTS**

- ❖ **4<sup>th</sup> Bagmati River Festival** till 21 August: Bagmati Eco-challenge. Relay team event along the river on 20 August. Bagmati Down River Kayak Race on 21 August. Jal Jatra, grand finale at Kalmorchan, Thapathali on 21 August. Rs 150.
- ❖ **Movies** 2PM onwards at the Alliance Francaise: Nikita, 22 August
- ❖ **Le Prix du Pardon**, The Prince of Forgiveness. A film by Mansour Sora Wade, 22 August, 5.30 PM at Nepal Tourism Board, Bhrikuti Mandap
- ❖ **Discussions at Martin Chautari**: How should NGOs finance their activities? 22 August, 3PM. Importance of writing in higher education. 23 August, 3PM. Junk food and food security. 24 August, 5PM. Film show and discussion. 26 August, 3PM. Coca-cola or Mohi? 26 August, 5:30 PM
- ❖ **Reiki course** for beginners, 26-27 August at HBMC, 4414843
- ❖ **Discovering Buddhism**, 10AM to 4PM at HMBC, August 21 and 22. 4414843
- ❖ **Creative Mandala Art** workshop by Carolyn Boch, 10AM-4PM on August 22 at HMBC. 4414843
- ❖ **St. Augustine's (Kalimpong)** School Day Celebration @ Hotel Nirvana, Thamel. 5.30 PM on 28 August. Tickets Rs 200 for 1996 batch & later and Rs 400 for everyone else. 9851022090
- ❖ **Surviving in culture** Support the Blue Diamond Society. 31 August, 12 noon to 2PM, starting at Tridevi Marg. 4443350, [bluediamondsociety@yahoo.com](mailto:bluediamondsociety@yahoo.com)
- ❖ **Changa Chait 2061** Kite flying at Club Himalaya, Nagarkot. 25 September, 2 and 16 October. Rs 100. 4410432

**MUSIC**

- ❖ **Tri Groove** at Moksh on 21 August. 7PM, Rs 300
- ❖ **Deo** at Not Just The Jazz Bar. Fridays at Hotel Shangri-la, Lazimpat.
- ❖ **Jatra Friday Nites** Live music by The Strings. 4256622
- ❖ **Live music** at Moksh. Musician's night and A-Four Guitar Quartet on Tuesdays and Full Circle on Fridays. 7PM onwards, free entry.

**DRINKS**

- ❖ **Ultimate cocktail** at Club Platinum. 8PM onwards, 21 August. Rs 600, includes one cocktail.
- ❖ **Island Bar** with DJ Raju, Abhya and The Cloud Walkers. The Rox Bar, Hyatt Regency. 4491234
- ❖ **Free drink deals** at Red Onion Bar, Lazimpat
- ❖ **Monsoon Wine Festival** at Kilroy's, Thamel. Rs 150 per large glass.
- ❖ **Lychee Martinis** and latest club hits at Rox Bar, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu,



**FOOD**

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- ❖ **Friday Nights** at Subterranea Club Kilroy. 4412821
- ❖ **Farm House Café** Nature with your meals at Park Village Hotel. 4375280
- ❖ **Café Bahal** Newari and continental cuisine at Kathmandu Guest House.
- ❖ **Vegetarian Creations** at Stupa View Restaurant. 4480262
- ❖ **Splash Spring BBQ** Wednesday and Friday evenings, 6PM onwards. Radisson Hotel, Kathmandu.
- ❖ **Executive Lunch** at Toran Restaurant, Dwarika's. 4479488
- ❖ **Sunny Side Up Weekend BBQ** at Soaltee Crowne Plaza Kathmandu. 4273999
- ❖ **The Beer Garden** at Vajrayantha, Godavari Village Resort. 5560675
- ❖ **Dwarika's Thali Lunch** at The Heritage courtyard. 4479488

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**KATHMANDU AIR QUALITY**

Heavy monsoon rains may cause the streets of Putali Sadak to fill with more water than the Bagmati on an average day, but at least they bring down the PM10 (particles small enough to enter the human body) in one of Kathmandu's most notoriously polluted areas. This week pollution actually dropped to the 'OK' level in Putali Sadak, as it did at most of the monitoring stations around the Valley—with the exception of the Patan Hospital area which remained 'unhealthy'.

Good	< 60
Ok	61 to 120
Unhealthy	121 to 350
Harmful	351 to 425
Hazardous	> 425

8 - 14 August in micrograms per cubic meter. Source: [www.mope.gov.np](http://www.mope.gov.np)

Putalisadak	112
Patan H	156
Thamel	56
TU	23
Bhaktapur	26
Matsyagaun	15

**NEPALI WEATHER** by MAUSAM BEED

With only one-third of the monsoon left, this satellite weather picture taken on Thursday afternoon shows more rains in store due to a prevailing low-pressure trough moving up to the Himalaya from the Bay. There is an active monsoon front moving across Nepal from east to west that will bring moderate to heavy showers all along the Mahabharat hills. Kathmandu Valley will be wetter this weekend, with sustained night rain and brief but heavy afternoon showers.

**KATHMANDU VALLEY**

Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue
29-19	28-19	27-18	26-18	26-19

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KIRAN PANDAY

**PEACE OF ART:** The child rights group, CWIN, organised this wall painting at Tripureswor on Thursday to commemorate Bal Dibas.



KIRAN PANDAY

**NEVER TOO YOUNG:** Tireless democracy campaigner, Chhaya Debi Parajuli, 87, and nine-year-old Prajana Koirala were both on a relay hunger strike to protest 'regression' at Ratna Park on Sunday.



KIRAN PANDAY

**WHAT BLOCKADE?** A baby monkey chews on a piece of paper as its mother watches Saune Sangkranti pilgrims at Pashupati on Monday.



KIRAN PANDAY

**GENERATION GAP:** Nepali Congress activist, 79-year-old Shamaraaj Pandey at a rally at Ratna Park on Wednesday to protest last week's petroleum price hike.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

**ATTRACTIVE TRAFFIC ISLAND:** Traffic Police using innovative methods to exhort road users to be 'civilised citizens' to mark Traffic Week.



KIRAN PANDAY

# Charcoal passion

**A**s a boy, Yudhistir Maharjan loved to watch his painter father at work, knowing all along that someday he would be like him. He didn't have to wait long. Barely 19, Yodhisthir has got his first exhibition.

After dabbling with oil on canvas and water colour he was inspired four years ago by artist Gobinda Dongol to take up charcoal. Since then, he has produced well over 100 charcoal drawings that are all unique and breathtaking: portraits of Jyapu farmers, the mysterious dark spaces above Kathmandu temples, traditional waterspouts, Ganesh posing with a flute and ancient wooden windows and pillars.

"My life means nothing without

charcoal," Yodhisthir tells us at the opening of his exhibition at the Indigo Art Gallery. Art was always in his genes, but Yodhisthir says he had to convince his parents that he could make a living out of his life's passion. "Either you become rich or you are penniless as an artist, but that is the risk I want to take," says Yodhisthir. His talent has earned him a scholarship at a college in the United States this year. So, is he coming back? "Most definitely," he replies, "this is here where I have always found inspiration."

Yodhisthir's inspiration comes especially from the shape and form of the god Ganesh, the popular 'obstacle remover'. "His paintings give us a breath of fresh air. You

soar into the space with his work," says Indigo Gallery's James Giambone who encouraged him to exhibit his work. Environmentalist Anil Chitrakar is also ecstatic: "The concept of space is so beautifully crafted."

With his first exhibition, Yodhisthir has already created a buzz. Even so, making a name for himself doesn't seem to be Yodhisthir's primary concern. As he says, "I really don't care about fame and money. After all, art is not a commodity. It is a passion." ●

(Naresh Newar)

Charcoal drawings by Yodhisthir Maharjan at Indigo Art Gallery, until 29 August. Tel: 4413580

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# Kathmandu Olympics 2092

With the wide variety on offer on cable television these days a lot of couch potatoes in the prime of their lives, like yours truly here, are in the horns of a conundrum. What do we watch: 24-Hour Fashion TV beamed live from Paris, or Women's Beach Volleyball in the Athens Olympics? Both are equally exciting and it is difficult to decide which one goes better with momos and the SanMig.

Luckily, as the Summer Olympics gets truly underway, there are other live broadcasts for us bored househusbands: Women's Synchronised Swimming and Women's Gymnastics (Artistic)—two

**UNDER MY HAT**  
Kunda Dixit



games in which the term 'sport' is used in its broadest possible sense. After this week's marathon tv watching, what puzzles me is if Women's

Synchronised Swimming is a sport fit for the Olympics, then surely the athletes sashaying down the ramp on Fashion TV should have qualified for a category in Athens. And what about the Equestrian Eventing Jumping, how come only the riders get the gold medals and not the horses who do all the donkey work?

The good news is that the International Olympics Committee is on the verge of including more sports to test the stamina, endurance and strength of athletes in the Modern Summer Games lineup, and we in Nepal had better start training for them so we can win some medals by the time the Summer Olympics are held in Kathmandu in 2092, and I'm talking about the Gregorian Calendar.



If we are to be true to the Olympic spirit, there are a lot of things from the ancient games that need to be revived. For instance, in ancient Greece, athletes took part in various events stark raving naked. Here I must add that only men were allowed to participate, and only young unmarried women were allowed to watch and pass rude comments about the various male accessories on display—a tradition that carries on to this day, especially during the men's Greco-Roman Wrestling Semi-Finals.

Anyway, we in Nepal shouldn't waste any more time in this idle banter and should get right down to practicing for the 2092 Summer Olympics. There is a lot at stake since the games will be held in our own country. By that time, the feud in our national Olympic committee will have been resolved with the formation of the Nepal National Olympic Committee (Democratic) and the All-Nepal Independent Olympic National Committee (Revolutionary). The blockade of Kathmandu Valley will also have finished by then, but don't bet on it. Kathmandu will have to be spruced up, and we have another 86 years to do something about Tin Kune and get the traffic lights at Maiti Ghar to start working again. The Olympics is a showcase event during which the whole world will be watching us, and we must put our best foot forward and throw all the garbage below the bridge.

The reason we never win any medals in the Olympics is because the events have been selected in the west, and they've only included games they're good at, like Men's Double Crap Shooting or Canoe Slalom. We must lobby hard in the IOC so that by 2092, there are games we too can win, like:

- Men's and Women's 1,000km High Altitude Marathon from Kangchenjunga to Dhaulagiri in which Nepal has a good chance to win gold, silver and bronze.
- Mt Everest Pentathlon: Walking Race to Advanced Base Camp, Swimming Across the Khumbu Glacial Lake, Mountain-Biking Up the Ice Fall, Sprinting Across the Western Cwm, Carrying Sick Western Commercial Climber to the Summit, Rollerblading Down to the South Col and Hang Gliding Back to Base Camp.
- Team White Water Rafting down the Bagmati, nose clips mandatory.
- Weightlifting Race Relay: Carrying 80kg of trekking gear from Jiri to Lukla in a minimum time of two days. No stops.
- Men's Individual 25m AK-47 Triathlon. We'll have plenty of practice by then.
- Political Leg-pulling Heats. Only those who won't let others get ahead qualify.
- Women's Bikini Bungee Jumping 1/16 Elimination

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